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**Verdi Reception in Milan, 1859-1881
Memory, Progress and Italian Identity**

Vella, Francesca

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**Verdi Reception in Milan, 1859-1881:
Memory, Progress and
Italian Identity**

**Francesca Vella
King's College London
July 2014**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of Music.

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Abstract

This thesis explores Verdi reception in Milan during 1859-81, particularly in connection with contemporary notions of *italianità*. It seeks to shed light on specifically Milanese representations of ‘Italianness’, investigating how attitudes to music, and opera in particular, reflected attempts at constructing and negotiating both local and national identities. By placing Verdi within a larger urban picture, this thesis offers a cultural history – one focused on music and Italian identity – of Milan during the period.

The thesis is comprised of four case studies. Chapter One addresses discourse about Verdi and Italian politics during 1859-61, further framing the discussion within a broader historical and historiographical purview. Chapter Two investigates the Milanese premiere of *Don Carlo* in 1868 in relation to the contemporary spread and perceptions of national monuments. Chapter Three considers the critical reception of Verdi’s *Messa da Requiem* for Alessandro Manzoni in 1874, suggesting that the binary rhetoric that underpinned the debates was a ‘political’ tool for negotiating musical notions of Italian identity. Finally, Chapter Four examines critical discourse about Verdi-Boito’s revised *Simon Boccanegra* and the revivals of various operas in Milan in 1881, discussing them in connection with that year’s National Industrial Exhibition and with the interpretative framework of the Operatic Museum.

This study overall suggests a revised, more nuanced narrative about late-nineteenth-century Verdi, opera and Italy. If, on the one hand, Milan’s contemporary culture maintained a strong awareness of its past, on the other, it was increasingly concerned with defining itself by construing images of the future. Far from representing merely the last epigone of Italy’s past – vocal, ‘melodic’ – musical tradition, Verdi came, in the eyes of Milanese critics, to embody ideas of musical innovation. Concepts of progress and change were indeed as deeply embedded in the contemporary imagination as were concepts of crisis and nostalgia of the past.

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Note on the Text

The thesis refers to many primary sources, most of which are in Italian. Nineteenth-century journal articles are anonymous unless stated otherwise. Long, indented quotations in the main text are given both in the original language and in English translation, which is my own unless otherwise indicated. Short quotations are given in English translation, while the original Italian (or, occasionally, French) is given in the footnotes. Whenever I draw significantly on primary sources without quoting them in the body of the text, I provide the excerpts in the original language only in the footnotes. Italics in all quotations are in the original.

Acknowledgments

When three and a half years ago, at the height of a dissertation-tinged summer and facing little prospect of a musical job in Italy, I surrendered to supervisory pressures that I embark on a PhD, I was starting to foresee reasons for enjoyment, but could hardly imagine musicology would take me in. Even less could I suspect that Verdi – a composer of works in a genre I'd little appreciated until then – would become so enmeshed with my professional and personal life. It was not me who first proposed the subject of this thesis. But I'm glad I had enough faith to take the offer, and others enough initiative to make it.

In reaching the final stage of my PhD, I feel fraught, perhaps unsurprisingly, with the sense of an end. More than a feeling of achievement, though, the completion of this project carries (for me) the redolence of fond moments from the past few years – and, somewhat more painfully, the whiff of possibilities, of opportunities that went wasted or that did not materialise. But perhaps in the latter lie this project's promises for the future: its invitation to look forward to new paths in this very same research; to believe in refreshed encounters with people never met or not deeply enough understood. In many ways it was the people this PhD brought into my life that made the whole experience meaningful to me.

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Finally, my family – my parents and sister, and all my grandparents (those here and those watching over from above) – are those whose presence I’ve never doubted and know for sure will be long-lasting whatever paths, shapes and paces our lives will take. They’ve been with me in every moment of joy and sorrow, and stood back quietly – the most difficult thing of all – when asked not to ask. They hardly know (blame on me) the topic of my research; yet since I embarked on Verdi they’ve never failed to encourage me, often in touching ways: by cutting out newspaper articles, collecting DVDs, rummaging the odd 1901 Verdi biography, or driving me to Busseto. I hope one day my two homes will feel less parted, and those who are dearest to me – only removed, I’m sure of that, in geographical terms – will have a chance to meet.

INTRODUCTION

There is no city in Italy in which Verdi has more admirers and has achieved greater triumphs than in Milan. Whatever the opinions and criticisms elsewhere, in Milan he has hitherto enjoyed undisputed supremacy, and at the Scala he can still hold his own against any new comer. The reason is not far to seek. As in her sentiments and aspirations Milan is, perhaps, of all Italian cities the most Italian, so is Verdi, perhaps, the most Italian of all living Italian composers, and it is therefore the strong chord of national sympathy that knits them together.

The self-assured, nationalist-cum-civic rhetoric of this opening assertion – an extract from a late-nineteenth-century article – will surprise few of those familiar with the inflated tone of post-Unification Italian debates about Verdi and, more broadly, about opera. Typically, discussions were not only concerned with the composer's and genre's part in Italy's self-image, but also with their identity-forming role in variously-configured, and highly competitive, municipal perspectives. This nineteenth-century statement could be read as a routine outburst of civic pride over Milan's status as the economic and artistic capital of the newly-born Italian Kingdom – as the so-called *capitale morale*.¹ What is more, the passage rehashes, with subtle rhetorical cues, a then burgeoning narrative about Verdi's contribution to the artistic and political 'resurgence' of his country – what historians have long come to refer to as Italy's 'Risorgimento'.² The local and the

¹ The origins of the image of Milan as *capitale morale* are usually associated with the National Industrial Exhibition of 1881; see, for instance, John Foot, *Milan since the Miracle: City, Culture and Identity* (Oxford and New York, 2001), 168. The epithet had nevertheless been in circulation for some time: it featured in an article by A[ntonio] Ghislanzoni in the *Gazzetta musicale di Milano* [henceforth *GMM*], 23 February 1868, 57. On the *capitale morale* myth, see Giovanna Rosa, *Il mito della capitale morale: letteratura e pubblicistica a Milano fra Otto e Novecento* (Milan, 1982).

² Vittorio Alfieri is usually held to have first used the word in its now common meaning indicating Italy's resurgence through liberation from foreign rule. 'Risorgimento' has nevertheless also acquired other connotations. As an historical period, the term designates the years (usually 1815 to 1861 or 1870) that preceded Italy's political Unification in 1861, and that featured a series of wars and political revolutions (in Italy as elsewhere in Europe). In a wider sense, it refers to various ideological, economic, social and cultural phenomena that characterised the Italian peninsula from the late eighteenth century until well after Unification. In both meanings, the Italian Risorgimento must be seen in close relation to European events and transformations. A third way of understanding the term is, in Lucy Riall's words, as 'a view of history', 'a rhetorical device' used for a retrospective re-reading of the Italian past according to present needs and political agendas: Riall, *Risorgimento: The History of Italy from Napoleon to Nation State* (Basingstoke and New York, 2009), 39. For two excellent introductions to Risorgimento historiography, see Riall, *Risorgimento*,

national are modulated in such ways that make the composer into the medium of their mutual identification; or, to see this from a different angle, the Verdi-Milan kinship could be said to be predicated on the badge of both the composer's and the city's asserted 'Italianness'.

These introductory observations, no matter how apparently ordinary the trumpeting of the newspaper excerpt, evoke a host of questions: concerning the reasons for and implications of Milan's celebratory Verdian musical image at *fin de siècle*; regarding patterns of exchange with and the different self-representation through opera of other Italian centres; or referring to the meaning of that 'something' called *italianità* which seemed to lie at the heart of both Milan's and Verdi's late-nineteenth-century representations. Addressing some of these questions would also open up new avenues for discussion of the Verdi opera that prompted the journalistic statements: the revised version of *Simon Boccanegra*. The article from which I have quoted dates from only a few weeks after the new opera's premiere at La Scala, Milan in March 1881 (the original version was first performed in Venice in 1857). The piece starts with the passage already cited, and goes on to address the opera. The anonymous author remarks on the 'national subject' of Verdi's work, particularly as embodied by the Doge Boccanegra ('a patriotic and upright champion of the national cause') and as laid out in the new Act-1 Finale. A special focus on this piece, the core of Verdi's and his librettist Arrigo Boito's 1880-81 revisions, was by no means unusual for press reports of the period. Much scholarly literature from closer to our time has also placed interpretative weight on this Finale, its interest stemming as much from its innovative musical language as from its credentials as – in the words of Julian Budden – 'Verdi's political testament, [...] the highest expression of social idealism in opera ever penned'.³

esp. 37-52, and Gilles Pécout, *Il lungo Risorgimento: la nascita dell'Italia contemporanea (1770-1922)*, ed. Roberto Balzani, trans. Marco Di Sario (Milan and Turin, 2011), esp. 3-27.

³ Julian Budden, *The Operas of Verdi*, 3 vols. (Oxford, 2001-2002 [1973-81]), II, *From Il trovatore to La forza del destino*, 334. On this Finale, Rodolfo Celletti also argued: 'the Council scene of the 1881 *Simon Boccanegra* rekindled his [Verdi's] old political passion. And so *Simon Boccanegra* is important because, for the last time, Verdi, one of the central characters in the new movement for unity within the young state, returned to the theme that he had so passionately supported in earlier years. He was then 68 years old, and perhaps disillusioned and embittered by the events following unification, but his voice still comes across firm and fervent, as he recalls the old ideals of the

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The political reverberations (or their lack) of Verdi's piece, however, have never been assessed in an historical perspective. What do we know about how this Finale, particularly the Doge's call for peace to the Genoa populace, prone to go to war against Venice, was understood during Verdi's time? What about its possible resonances with Italy's ongoing process of nation-building and with memories of the Risorgimento struggles, which had led to Unification in 1861? As it happens, evidence for political readings in the Italian press is scarce. The article cited above is, in fact, of foreign manufacture: it appeared in *The Musical Times* in May 1881.⁴ Far from chiming with the Italianate and Milanese zeal of the British reporter, journalists in Milan greeted Verdi's opera in a more subdued tone: a tone that shied away from chauvinistic declarations on the new Finale to Act 1.

This introduction in many ways starts from the end: *Simon Boccanegra* and its early critical debates will form the subject of the final chapter of this thesis. The British article also draws attention to issues that I shall (almost exclusively) address in the Conclusion: discrepancies between Verdi's Italian and foreign reception; specifically the fact that the composer's long-lasting national image may have been drawn jointly, to a greater extent than has so far been assumed, by both Italian and foreign hands. But I hope my reasons for choosing the opening excerpt will become clear as this introduction and the following chapters unfold. Verdi, Italy and Milan: these are the three actors in the limelight of this thesis, all of which are also at the forefront, in a tightly-knit historical configuration, of the *Musical Times* quotation. The passage thus provides a valuable synthesis of contemporary views as well as historiographical questions from which to depart.

This thesis aims to rethink the long-debated relationship between Verdi and late-nineteenth-century Italian nationalism from a local, urban perspective. It investigates Verdi reception in Milan during 1859-81, seeking to retrace some of

heroic years of the Risorgimento': Celletti, 'An Historical Perspective', in '*Simon Boccanegra*': *Giuseppe Verdi*, English National Opera Guides, 32 (London and New York, 1985), 7-12, 12. For other studies of the Act-1 Finale, see Harold Power, '*Simon Boccanegra* I.10-12: A Generic-Genetic Analysis of the Council Chamber Scene', *19th-Century Music*, 13/2 (1989), 101-28, and Gary Tomlinson, 'Learning to Curse at Sixty-Seven', *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 14/1-2 (2002), 229-41.

⁴ *The Musical Times*, 1 May 1881, 229-30 (229 and 230 for quotations that appeared earlier).

the ways in which the composer's music and public persona became entangled with contemporary perceptions of *italianità*. Through a focus on four Verdian 'moments' in Milan's late-nineteenth-century history, this study attempts to shed light on specifically Milanese representations of 'Italianness' as they emerge in contemporary music (particularly opera) criticism.

Despite a growing interest in cultural histories of opera grounded in urban milieux,⁵ few studies have located the relationship between opera and nineteenth-century Italian identity in the cultural policies and self-perception of different municipal communities. Axel Körner's recent study of politics of culture in late-nineteenth- to early-twentieth-century Bologna and Jutta Toelle's analysis of the role of La Scala in Milan's late-nineteenth-century administration constitute notable exceptions to this trend; yet the topic remains in need of attention.⁶ What is more, while the relationship between notions of the local and the national has long inspired debate among French and German scholars in other historical fields, it has largely remained unaddressed in Italian historiography.⁷ Indeed, David Laven and Elsa Damien have recently called for a reconsideration of the role played by localisms in shaping different visions of the Italian nation-state and Italian identity. They have argued that, far from merely constituting an obstacle to nation-building, 'local identity could actually be the basic building block for creating the nation': local narratives came to be 'subsumed' within larger claims about the nation, while the cities' experience of the Risorgimento (and, later, their participation in the newly-born nation-state) led to a 'reconceptualization' of local identities.⁸

⁵ See, for instance, Benjamin Walton, *Rossini in Restoration Paris: The Sound of Modern Life* (Cambridge, 2007), and Anselm Gerhard, *The Urbanization of Opera: Music Theatre in Paris in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago and London, 1998).

⁶ Axel Körner, *Politics of Culture in Liberal Italy: From Unification to Fascism* (New York and London, 2009), and Jutta Toelle, *Bühne der Stadt: Mailand und das Teatro alla Scala zwischen Risorgimento und Fin de Siècle* (München and Wien, 2009).

⁷ See the studies by Celia Applegate, *A Nation of Provincials: The German Idea of Heimat* (Berkeley, 1990); Alon Confino, *The Nation as a Local Metaphor: Württemberg, Imperial Germany, and National Memory, 1871-1918* (Chapel Hill and London, 1997); and Anne-Marie Thiesse, *Ils apprenaient la France: L'exaltation des régions dans le discours patriotique* (Paris, 1997).

⁸ David Laven and Elsa Damien, 'Empire, City, Nation: Venice's Imperial Past and the "Making of Italians" from Unification to Fascism', available at http://eprints.nottingham.ac.uk/2160/1/Empire_City_Nation_inBerger%26Miller.pdf (accessed 15 February 2014); and David Laven, 'Venice 1848-1915: The Venetian Sense of the Past and the

The want for urban histories in studies of nationalisms has also been pointed out by other scholars – such as William Whyte, Oliver Zimmer and Angharad Closs Stephens – on the basis of different arguments. Whyte and Zimmer have expressed the urge to multiply images of nationalist projects: to lessen the notion of nations and national identities as ‘given’ – as imposed on or received passively by heterogeneous local or municipal communities – and root the shaping of such constructs in a variety of local contexts.⁹ Stephens, on the other hand, has proposed that we think not only ‘beyond the nation’, but also beyond the binaries and assumptions on which nationalist imaginaries – as well as failed attempts at replacing such accounts with global or cosmopolitan histories – have been based: we/them oppositions, notions of communities as bounded in space, and unfailingly linear conceptions of time. According to Stephens, the city provides a useful tool for imagining a different type of coexistence, one animated by conflicts and encounters, while also questioning, in line with Benjaminian depictions of a disjointed urban time, the often assumed linearity of modern understandings of temporality.¹⁰

Here, then, are some of the reasons for my specifically urban snapshots. But why Milan? Why not another Italian city? Of course there could have been alternatives, and the choice has to some extent been pragmatic (motivated, among other things, by the overall efficiency of Milanese libraries and archives). But Milan’s nineteenth-century affiliation with opera, and with Verdi in particular, in both its self- and external representations made it a particularly attractive milieu for a case study of attitudes to the composer and to *italianità*. The city’s status as the musical and operatic capital of the peninsula had been under way, although not unchallenged, since the beginning of the century. The Royal Theatre of La Scala (the other being the Canobbiana) had been serving both as a tool for social and political control in the hands of the Habsburg administration (although with increasing difficulties from the 1840s), and as a symbol of local and national

Creation of the Italian Nation’, in *Nationalism and the Reshaping of Urban Communities in Europe, 1848-1914*, ed. William Whyte and Oliver Zimmer (Basingstoke, 2011), 47-73, 50 and 67.

⁹ See William Whyte and Oliver Zimmer, ‘Introduction’, in *Nationalism and the Reshaping of Urban Communities*, 1-13.

¹⁰ See Angharad Closs Stephens, *The Persistence of Nationalism: From Imagined Communities to Urban Encounters* (London and New York, 2013).

prestige both before and after Unification.¹¹ It is no surprise that the operatic ‘crisis’ of the 1860s – the decade’s ubiquitous ruminations on the shortage of new Italian compositions, the invasion of foreign works, the spread of instrumental music, and the lack of subventions to the theatres – was often fashioned in the local press as the decadence of the city’s chief opera house.¹²

Verdi himself lost no occasion to deplore the state of the theatre, both the Milan institution and the Italian scene more in general, although his issues with the course of both were doubtless also more personal. His rapport with La Scala had deteriorated during the mid 1840s, when a number of unsatisfactory stagings of his early operas led him to withdraw the premieres of his later works from the Milan opera house. It would take over twenty years, and the goodwill of both Verdi’s wife Giuseppina Strepponi and his editor Giulio Ricordi, for the debut of a new (or, better, revised) opera – *La forza del destino*, in the 1869 version – to be granted back to the Milanese stage by the composer. But Verdi’s contentions with the local and national operatic scene were also his own, typically snarky reaction to those recent developments hinted at above: changing compositional and performance practices; Italian composers’ increasing compliance to progress (i.e., in the contemporary rhetoric, French and German opera) in lieu of commitment to (the Italian) tradition.¹³ Milan was at the forefront of such changes – and of their reverberations in the musical-theatrical press – during the 1860s, its ‘progressive’ status taken up by other centres, most promptly Bologna, from the end of the decade.¹⁴ Verdi’s position was, to be sure, by no means unequivocal: as Chapter

¹¹ See John Rosselli, *Music and Musicians in Nineteenth-Century Italy* (London, 1991), 21; Toelle, *Bühne der Stadt*, esp. 30-61; and Bruno Spaepen, “‘Governare per mezzo della Scala’: l’Austria e il teatro d’opera a Milano”, *Contemporanea*, 6/4 (2003), 593-620.

¹² For opera in Milan during the 1860s, and various aspects of its ‘crisis’, see Carlos del Cueto, ‘Opera in 1860s Milan and the End of the Rossinian Tradition’ (Ph.D. diss., University of Cambridge, 2011).

¹³ See Roger Parker, ‘Verdi alla Scala, 1832-1901’, in *Verdi e la Scala*, ed. Francesco Degrada (Milan, 2001), 1-64, here 18-37.

¹⁴ Körner has argued that a turning point in Bologna’s operatic culture was the Italian premiere of Meyerbeer’s *L’Africaine* (as *L’africana*) in 1865, which inaugurated a more ‘cosmopolitan’ phase in the Teatro Comunale’s repertoire (one that would culminate in the Italian premieres of *Don Carlo* in 1867 and Wagner’s *Lohengrin* in 1871). Florence had been a forward-looking operatic centre, open to French opera (Meyerbeer) during the 1820s to the 1850s; see Körner, *Politics of Culture*, 230-1. For a study of *grand opéra* in Bologna, see also Cormac Newark, “‘In Italy We Don’t Have the Means for Illusion’: *Grand Opéra* in Nineteenth-Century Bologna”, *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 19/3 (2007), 199-222.

Two and Three of this thesis will bring to mind, the composer's conservative statements, when not ambivalent in themselves, were often contradicted by his compositional choices, which pointed to a renovation of his own (and Italians') musical language. In fact, this thesis has gradually come to shape precisely as an attempt to capture the kindred images and impulses of a composer, a city and a nation torn between the past and the future; taken up with antithetical attractions to the old and to the new.

The years spanned by this study – those falling between 1859 and 1881 – doubtless encouraged such an approach. Not only did they coincide, in Milan's musical culture as in that of other Italian cities, with an increasing rediscovery of 'old' compositions (both sacred and operatic) and the hardening of the notion of the operatic repertory (partly as a result of the lack of new successful Italian works); they also saw attempts at rewriting the recent political events that had shaken the peninsula in backward-looking, nostalgic perspectives. The Risorgimento itself, not only Verdi's controversial connections with it, came to be shaped in mythical disguises. At the same time, though, the two decades following Unification lay claims to cultural renewal on both a local and a national level. Milan in particular was at the centre of profound urban transformations (ones discussed in Chapter Two), and besides retaining its status as the most prosperous publishing centre of the peninsula, it also led the vanguard of the (slow) Italian process of industrialisation.¹⁵ The National Industrial Exhibition of 1881, with its taxonomic fever manifested in statistics, arrays of objects and dedicated accounts of each of its separate exhibits, was indeed meant to be the veritable symbol of the city's, and the nation's, progress and modernisation.

The picture emerging from the following chapters, then, is one in which memory, notions of progress and of (locally-refracted) Italian identity interplay in moulding

¹⁵ On Milan as a publishing centre in the early- and later-nineteenth century, see Marino Berengo, *Intellettuali e librai nella Milano della Restaurazione* (Turin, 1980), and *Libri, giornali e riviste a Milano: storia delle innovazioni nell'editoria Milanese dall'Ottocento ad oggi*, ed. Fausto Colombo (Milan, 1998). For a history of the leading Milanese music publishing house Ricordi, see Stefano Baia Curioni, *Mercanti dell'opera: storie di Casa Ricordi* (Milan, 2011).

the contours of Verdi's music and public persona. Each chapter adopts a particular chronological focus, a focus prompted – in all cases but Chapter One – by the world or local premiere of a work by the composer. Through examination of contemporary critical reports, mostly taken from the Milanese daily and periodical press, as well as a broad range of other primary sources, my aim has been to move beyond the sticky dyad of Verdi and the Risorgimento (an account of which is nonetheless provided in Chapter One), and engage with the composer's connections with nineteenth-century Italian nationalism from other angles. For one thing, and as mentioned before, I look at the period 1859-81, one often disregarded in studies of Verdi reception in Italy (which have mostly focused on the 1840s and 1850s);¹⁶ for another, I explore claims about the composer that, while not necessarily containing overtly political readings of his life and music, are nevertheless resonant of attempts at shaping an Italian identity, musical and otherwise.

Chapter One begins by setting the stage for renewed discussion about Verdi's nineteenth-century political image – about appropriations of the composer's music and persona to contemporary political agendas. After an overview of recent scholarly literature on Verdi, opera and the Risorgimento, the chapter concentrates on attitudes to Verdi and Italian politics during the events of 1859-61. It does so by tracing reports of the slogan 'Viva VERDI' (a royalist-patriotic watchword, standing for 'Viva Vittorio Emanuele Re d'Italia', in use before the Second War of Independence of 1859), as well as through a case study of the reception of a few so-called 'patriotic' operas by the composer in Milan during the period. The aim of this chapter is to reveal a more multi-faceted image of 'Verdi politico' than the one that has traditionally been asserted (in popular as well as some scholarly accounts): an image ingrained by subtle chronological and geographical discontinuities, and occasionally disturbed by discordant voices. Furthermore, the chapter frames the 1859-61 material and its discussion within a broader chronological purview, offering a collection of book and newspaper

¹⁶ For a notable exception, see Emanuele Senici, 'Verdi's *Falstaff* at Italy's Fin de Siècle', *Musical Quarterly*, 85/2 (2001), 274-310.

excerpts dating into the early 1890s that trace some of the political tropes on the composer as they emerged and evolved in subsequent years.

Chapter Two focuses on the Milanese premiere of *Don Carlo* at La Scala in 1868. The opera made little impression as a theatrical event: critics were lukewarm, in part because the work had been premiered at a rival operatic centre, the Paris Opéra, a year earlier – and, since then, in several other cities. Yet the Milanese musical press never ceased to comment on the opera's journeys around Italy and Europe. Debates focused on various topics, but my chapter's take is prompted by claims about the opera's 'monumental' character. Far from merely constituting reactions to the unforeseen length of the opera or reflecting Verdi's increasing prestige as a national icon, these statements about *Don Carlo*'s monumentality reflect complex attitudes to historical time. In this chapter, I explore some of these attitudes both in relation to cultural changes taking place in Milan in the 1860s, and to the twofold function of monuments as instruments for remembrance of the past and announcements of the future. Focusing on contemporary work of urban renewal, the spread of national monuments, debates on the so-called *musica dell'avvenire*, and 'resurrections' of ancient musical compositions, I argue that *Don Carlo* was depicted as a monument because its musical language both pointed to the past and offered directions to the future. In this sense, it was the epitome of contemporary Italian, and specifically Milanese, attempts to mediate between these temporal categories.

Chapter Three moves on into the 1870s and explores the early reception of Verdi's *Messa da Requiem* (1874), written for and premiered in Milan on the first anniversary of the death of Alessandro Manzoni. The dedicatee of the piece, the famous Italian and Milanese novelist, and the work's connections with late-nineteenth-century nationalist revivals of 'old' sacred music lie at the basis of many scholarly attempts to explore Verdi's composition from a political perspective. What is more, ever since its premiere, the *Requiem* has aroused both critical and scholarly discussion pertaining to issues of musical genre (is the piece 'sacred' or 'operatic'?). In this chapter, I suggest new, more nuanced approaches to the political resonances of Verdi's work, and seek ways out of encrusted nineteenth-century dichotomies such as old/new, progress/crisis, sacred/operatic or

vocal/instrumental. Linking such oppositional rhetoric to attempts to construct an Italian identity (one measured against a variously configured cultural Other), I explore contemporary tropes of crisis and degeneration, and show how in the *Requiem* debates they were tied up to claims about musical progress and the power of music to produce moral and socio-political change.

Finally, Chapter Four investigates critical discourse about the premiere of Verdi's revised *Simon Boccanegra* and the revivals of other operas in Milan in 1881 in connection with that year's National Industrial Exhibition. Accounts of all these events had constantly to negotiate an attraction to the new with burgeoning interest in the cultural past. If the exhibition was often depicted in museum-like fashion, operatic reviews forced the readers into peculiar strolls back in time – concerned as they were with memories of the original versions of the works, of their first performances, of dropped singing styles, and so on. On the one hand, this heightened awareness of historical distance paved the way to a style of opera criticism in which the 'work' and the 'event' of its performance were to become increasingly separated. On the other, by coming to be investigated in their own right, performances gained a status similar to that of musical compositions in critical attempts to chart Italy's journey to musical progress. The scholarly notion of the Operatic Museum, traditionally understood as a warehouse for display of imaginary musical works, thus could be redrafted on the basis of more complex historical accounts: not only those to be found in late-nineteenth-century opera reports, but also those offered, as this final chapter will show, by contemporary staging manuals.

The trajectory of this thesis, perhaps inevitably given its position in my own exploration of the subject, gradually moves away from Verdi – from the composer's voice, and from Verdi as a unique, perhaps even solitary figure in the contemporary Italian operatic panorama. Indeed, this study ends with a chapter in which primary sources concerning operas by the composer (particularly, but not only, *Simon Boccanegra*) serve less as tools for making claims specific to Verdi reception than as sparks for raising broader questions about Italian operatic culture during the period. While I still believe that digging into Verdi's epistolary persona and his compositional practices can, especially in the case of the composer's last

operas, shed light on wider contemporary responses to change and development in operatic culture, I have also become convinced that the topic of Verdi's place in late-nineteenth-century Italian nationalism is best assessed by placing the composer and his music in a larger picture. This picture should include operas by other (now neglected) composers; the influence of foreign views on Italian opera, culture and politics; the nationalist appropriation of French and German works in the contemporary repertoire of Italian theatres; patterns of change in a city's operatic culture as a response to the cultural policies of other centres; and still more. Some of these threads emerge, at a point or another, in what follows; but each of them above all offers a prospect for future research.

The chronological span of this thesis and its focus on four 'moments' are doubtless limited, although the decisions that led to them have not been arbitrary. The years 1859-61 had already been identified by scholars as crucial in marking a shift in the way Verdi's political credentials were understood.¹⁷ While the results of my research for Chapter One have mostly confirmed this view, the recent discovery of earlier material – material dating from the mid 1850s, and revealed in an article by Mary Ann Smart – suggests we need to carry out more research into critical opinions from the 1850s.¹⁸ The latter end of this thesis's chronological purview – 1881 – appeared a fitting finale for reasons to do both with Milan's history (the nationalist as well as modernist claims that underpinned the Industrial Exhibition) and with Verdi's revisionist project in *Simon Boccanegra*. Not only was the new opera the product of the composer's first attempt at a collaboration with Arrigo Boito (the future librettist of *Otello* and *Falstaff*); it also, through its stylistic discrepancies, presented a sound world that chimed with broader contemporary concerns about textualising the national past while at the same time advancing on the road to the future. The year thus offered a valuable context for the underlying argument of the thesis as a whole.

¹⁷ See in particular Michael Sawall, "VIVA V.E.R.D.I.": origine e ricezione di un simbolo nazionale nell'anno 1859', in *Verdi 2001: Atti del convegno internazionale, Parma, New York, New Haven, 24 gennaio-1° febbraio 2001*, ed. Fabrizio Della Seta, Roberta Montemorra Marvin and Marco Marica, 2 vols. (Florence, 2003), I, 123-31, here 130.

¹⁸ Mary Ann Smart has discussed the significance of an 1855 article by music critic Marco Marcelliano Marcello in her 'How Political were Verdi's Operas? Metaphors of Progress in the Reception of *I Lombardi alla prima crociata*', *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 18/2 (2013), 190-204; for more on this and another article by the same critic, see Chapter One.

Of course, there are notable absences too: first and foremost *Aida* (its European premiere at La Scala in February 1872, which followed the world premiere at Cairo in December 1871); and the role played by other, smaller Milanese opera houses in the picture of Verdi reception I draw. *Aida* could, to be sure, have been an alternative choice to *Don Carlo*; it was a much greater hit on both the local and national level. But precisely because *Don Carlo* felt more problematic – owing to its mixture of French and Italian styles, old and new forms, its Italian premiere at the competing Teatro Comunale di Bologna in 1867, and the supposed ‘crisis’ of Italian opera during the 1860s – that opera seemed to offer more decisive topics for debate within contemporary discussions about the future of Italian music. What is more, *Don Carlo*’s Milanese premiere coincided with the beginning of Verdi’s rapprochement with the city and with La Scala. If Milan’s numerous other theatres – there were a total of seven (besides La Scala) with opera seasons in 1861 – play an only subordinate part in the following chapters, it is not because I deem them less relevant to the cultural picture I have tried to recover, but because of the paucity of substantial critical accounts that can be traced about their repertoire in the contemporary press.¹⁹

Put boldly, then, this study aims to be a cultural history of Milan during 1859-81: a history centred on perceptions of Verdi, opera and *italianità*. By analysing claims about the composer, opera and music in general, it seeks to sharpen our understanding of Italian nationalism as a set of discursive practices that underpinned debates about a wide range of cultural phenomena. Addressing Verdi reception in conjunction with these broader concerns – and within the Milanese locale – has meant that a somewhat altered image of the composer emerges. As we shall see, even though Milan’s post-Unification culture maintained a strong awareness of its past, it was also increasingly concerned with remoulding itself according to heightened perceptions of the future. Studied in this context, the reception of Verdi’s operas and his own projection of a public persona suggest a revised understanding of late-nineteenth-century Italy and opera criticism: one in some respects different from that advanced in most studies so far; one in which

¹⁹ This figure is provided by Raffaella Valsecchi in ‘Teatri d’opera a Milano, 1861-1880’, in *Milano musicale, 1861-1897*, ed. Bianca Maria Antolini (Lucca, 1999), 3-20, here 3.

INTRODUCTION

ideas of progress and historical change are seen as deeply rooted in the contemporary imagination, as were concepts of crisis and nostalgia of the past.

CHAPTER ONE

Verdi and Politics: Then and Now

At the end of November 1890, news was leaked that the seventy-seven-year-old Giuseppe Verdi was composing a new – comic – opera. The press release first appeared in the *Corriere della sera* and passed from one paper to another; it set up the premise for the latest hubbub among Italians over their greatest opera composer.¹ Leone Fortis, writing in Ricordi's house journal, the *Gazzetta musicale di Milano*, was one of the first to welcome Verdi's decision to write *Falstaff*. The critic recalled how the cry 'Viva Verdi!', which now (he claimed) erupted from all over the peninsula as a salutation to 'the resurrection of Italian comic opera', had once had a second, more cryptic and action-impelling meaning: 'Viva Vittorio Emanuele Re d'Italia'. In 1858-59, Fortis argued, the motto had carried 'an explosive burst charged with patriotic hopes – and made every Italian heart leap up'.²

In the next issue of the *Gazzetta* (see Figure 1.1), in response to Fortis's *risorgimentale* recollection, a certain Domenico Bima wrote to the editor, Giulio Ricordi, inviting him to publish a sonnet that (he thought he remembered) had first appeared in a paper called *La stampa* at the time of the acrostic episode, and then had travelled around the country via the pages of other newspapers.³ The poem, apparently signed 'Un Parmigiano', was entitled 'Viva Verdi!'. As the text clarifies, the address was less for the composer's Savoy *alter ego* than for Verdi himself, whose musical genius had 'healed the agony' of Italians, and whose 'divine music [had] redeemed the name of the Lombards'. The poem makes no reference to the encoded political meaning of 'Viva Verdi!'; yet its language

¹ See Marcello Conati, *Interviews and Encounters with Verdi*, trans. Richard Stokes (London, 1984), 228-9.

² 'la resurrezione dell'opera buffa italiana', 'lo scoppio di un petardo carico di speranze patriottiche – e faceva trasalire ogni cuore italiano': L[eone] Fortis, 'Il vecchio maestro', in *GMM*, 7 December 1890, 773-5, 773.

³ Bima's might be a reference to the Turin newspaper *La stampa*, founded by Ruggero Bonghi and published between 1862 and 1865 (in which case Bima's dating of the sonnet to 1858-59 would be incorrect); or to the journal *La stampa: giornale di scienze, lettere, arti, teatri e varietà*, which was published in Milan between 22 April 1857 and 20 March 1858 (in which case the sonnet would predate the acrostic episode, about which more later).

Gazzetta musicale di Milano

come parimente tornerebbe assai opportuno un provvedimento sociale per la intellettuale nullatenenza da cui sono miserevolmente affetti. Un altro fatto poi, altrettanto chiaro, vivo, sto per dire vivente, che fa sì che non resti più alcun dubbio sulla giustizia della causa che sosteniamo, è quello stato compiuto dal signor Verdi tre anni or sono, quando cioè egli contava di già, secondo le pretese degli avversari, settantaquattro anni: numero, come potete credere, sufficiente a far dire, con un personaggio del Rovetta, che la primissima gioventù è passata. Il fatto cui accenno si chiama *Otello*, e non aggiungo altro.

Dico, cioè, solamente questo a coloro che, malgrado le prove messe innanzi, persistessero tuttavia a credere alla vecchiezza di Giuseppe Verdi: se a poter fare un *Otello* basta qualche chilogramma di cognizioni e un po' di senile raffinatezza, io propongo che si abolisca il genio e la gioventù e tutte le cose belle che sono la forza, la robustezza, la sincerità, la fantasia sconfinata e ardente, gli entusiasmi divini e le divine ebbrezze, la fede, l'amore, e che si nasca a settant'anni, scettici, acciaccosi, impotenti, ma colla quintessenza dell'alto gusto!!

Sorrída intanto il grande maestro e diradi sull'ampia ed augusta fronte quelle rughe che non ha: niuna giovinezza mai, su questo tutti convengono, destò intorno a sé un più unanime e largo coro di simpatie, di speranze, di contento grande e di nobile orgoglio, di quello che oggi si raccoglie attorno al suo arguto e onesto sorriso, che è sorriso di soddisfazione intima per tutta una lunga vita, non sempre beata né scevra d'ostacoli, nobilmente spesa a pro della patria e dell'arte, ed è sorriso di serena e certa coscienza di potere a quelle nuovamente scovire altri tesori, altri argomenti di onore e di gloria. In alto i cuori, in alto le menti.

Torino, 10 dicembre 1890.

SEBASTIANO ZILIOLO.

Livorno, 9 dicembre.

Preg. Sig. Comm. Giulio Ricordi,
Direttore della Gazzetta Musicale di Milano.

Bell'articolo dell'ultimo numero della *Gazzetta* nel quale l'egregio L. Fortis rammenta come fra il 1858 e il 1859 gli italiani inneggiando al loro più grande maestro vivente trovarono che quel grido di *Viva Verdi* corrispondeva in acrostico ad esprimere le loro aspirazioni patriottiche, e ne fecero il loro grido di guerra che non poteva essere incriminabile nelle provincie ancora soggette, mi richiamò alla memoria un sonetto che in quel tempo comparve, mi pare, sul giornale *La Stampa*, e fece poi il giro di tutti quelli della penisola.

Se ella crede che ai lettori della *Gazzetta* possa non esser discaro il conoscerlo (dai più è certo ignorato) ora appunto che il grido nuovamente alto risuona alla notizia che il celebre maestro sta per darci novella prova del suo genio inesauribile, lo pubblichi. Credo di ricordarlo parola per parola e qui lo trascrivo: chi sa che alla distanza di tanti anni ridestandosi la curiosità non si venga a cono-

scerne l'autore! Se la memoria non falla, a quell'epoca era firmato semplicemente « Un Parmigiano. »

Eccolo:

VIVA VERDI!

Verdi! nome diletto a tutte genti
Dell'italica terra! una favella
Tu parli al cuor che mitiga i tormenti
E dischiude al pensier alma novella.
Sebbene invidia con rabbiosi denti
Ti morda ognor, sta salda la tua stella;
E al fascino di tue note possenti
S'inalza sempre, e fulgerà più bella.
Verdi! incedi animoso! e se fu avara
Con te la sorte un dì, forse al tuo crine
Un nuovo serto Italia mia prepara.
O magnanimo all'opra! Or che più tardi?
Non morrà chi con musiche divine
Abbia redento il nome dei Lombardi.

I tempi avverarono la predizione del poeta: Verdi la superò, ed oggi ancora ce ne dà nuova prova: io mi auguro per lunghi anni e in altre circostanze simili a questa di poter gridare con ogni buon italiano che ami la musica del proprio paese: *Viva Verdi!*

E con questo grido chiudo, e, se me lo permette, le stringo la mano.

Suo devotissimo
DOMENICO BIMA.

CORRISPONDENZE

VENEZIA, 11 Dicembre.

Feste al maestro Nicolò Coccon per il suo Giubileo.

ECCO cara impressione a tutti gli amici ed estimatori del chiarissimo maestro Nicolò cav. Coccon il nobile, giusto e sentito cenno pubblicato nell'ultimo numero della *Gazzetta Musicale* per l'occasione del giubileo artistico dell'egregio uomo.

In onore appunto di Nicolò Coccon, oggi, nell'Orfanotrofio dei Gesuiti — ove egli ebbe la sua educazione artistica — vi fu una festa solennissima per celebrare la fausta ricorrenza.

Diunzi a oltre 500 persone furono eseguite talune composizioni del dotto musicista, quali una *Sonata* per orchestra, un *Incarnatus* di una delle ultime *Messe*, per voci ed orchestra, ed una *Cantata* a sei voci scritta oltre 20 anni addietro. — Tutte queste composizioni, degne invero del chiaro autore, furono applauditissime. Diresse la *Sonata* il valente maestro D. Acerbi — allievo esso pure, e così distinto, dello stesso Orfanotrofio — e gli altri due pezzi furono diretti dall'egregio maestro R. Carcano. Inutile dire che professori d'orchestra e coristi, appartenenti o no alla Cappella Musicale in S. Marco, della quale il cav. Coccon è maestro primario, prestarono gentilmente l'opera loro.

Vi furono due discorsi di circostanza, il primo del maestro Luigi Poli, il secondo dell'abate comm. Bernardi. Il primo specialmente fu molto caldo e traboccante di affetto.

Al maestro Coccon fu presentata una ricca medaglia d'oro, frutto di una sottoscrizione, nonché regali, fiori, corone e versi in gran copia.

Anche S. Em. il Patriarca cardinale Agostini, non potendo intervenire alla festa, scrisse al maestro Coccon una nobile lettera.

Il Municipio inviò la Banda cittadina coll'egregio suo maestro Jacopo Calascione.

Il Liceo Benedetto Marcello era largamente rappresentato. Vi ho veduto il suo direttore artistico maestro R. Grazzini e parecchi professori.

Sento che in una prossima serenata si ha intenzione di eseguire la *Cantata* che oggi fece tanta buona impressione e che aggiuntivi i soprani ed i contralti, che oggi mancavano, piacerà anche di più; e sento

Figure 1.1: *Gazzetta musicale di Milano*, 14 December 1890, 800.

hinges on a texture of subtle, if not overt, allusions that point to a weaving of Verdi's private and artistic story with that of the pre-Unification Italian nation. What is more, Bima's attempts to recollect – his characteristic elocution, in his letter to Ricordi, scattered with 'it seems to me', 'I think I remember', and 'if memory serves me right' – could only increase the aura attached to the patriotic slogan.

This chapter thus opens with the late-nineteenth-century circulation of a document (it does not matter whether it was real or invented) that allegedly dated from decades earlier. One of my aims in what follows is to foreground the role played by historical distance, above all by the *perception* of cultural-historical discontinuities, in the formation and continual redefinition of Verdi's political image – both over time and, I shall suggest, over space. In line with recent efforts to analyse nationalist imaginaries in relation to historical conceptions of time, I will propose that the increasing linearity and heterogeneity underpinning nineteenth-century understandings of temporality – that is, aspects of contemporary discourse, as opposed to 'raw' political or cultural events – are essential to capture the sense of the mythical conflation of Verdi's and Italy's nineteenth-century developments.⁴

Bima's account is but one of many that came to be woven around various episodes of Verdi's life and artistic career during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Many of these anecdotes, mostly launched by early biographers of the composer and reiterated in the subsequent literature, both popular and scholarly, up to the present day, are focussed on facts – very often invented facts – with some kind of political, nationalist significance. In recent years, joint efforts from both musicologists and historians have begun a process of demythologisation. The image of a 'patriotic' Verdi – the champion of Italians' uprising against foreign oppression, and the composer whose early choruses were said to have incited the riots and revolutions in northern Italy during the 1840s – has been shown to be mostly the result of retrospective interpretations.

⁴ On the connections between the rise of ideas of the nation and modern conceptions of time, see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London and New York, 2006 [1983]), and Angharad Closs Stephens, *The Persistence of Nationalism: From Imagined Communities to Urban Encounters* (London and New York, 2013).

Beginning in the 1990s, but developing earlier research by Frank Walker and John Rosselli, Roger Parker and a number of other scholars have sought to track down the origins of the Verdi myth. They have explained its formation in the wake of Italy's political Unification and contemporary urges for monumentalising the national past. Debates on 'Verdi politico' have since then accompanied Verdi studies, producing a variety of approaches to the topic and more or less extreme positions on either side of the battlefield opened up by the revisionist claims.⁵ Discussion has clustered around a number of issues: the nationalist sentiments that some of Verdi's early operas (particularly *Nabucco*) may or may not have fuelled in Italy during the 1840s;⁶ a range of cases of political censorship, which Verdi and his librettists experienced when composing operas for various Italian theatres;⁷ and the issue of compositional intentions – of what Verdi had in mind when he set to

⁵ Frank Walker, *The Man Verdi* (London, 1962), and John Rosselli, *The Opera Industry in Italy from Cimarosa to Verdi: The Role of the Impresario* (Cambridge, 1984). The standard revisionist texts are: Birgit Pauls, *Giuseppe Verdi und das Risorgimento: ein politischer Mythos im Prozess der Nationenbildung* (Berlin, 1996); Roger Parker, "*Arpa d'or dei fatidici vati*": *The Verdian Patriotic Chorus in the 1840s* (Parma, 1997); John Rosselli, *The Life of Verdi* (Cambridge, 2000), esp. 73-80; Mary Ann Smart, 'Liberty On (and Off) the Barricades: Verdi's Risorgimento Fantasies', in *Making and Remaking Italy: The Cultivation of National Identity around the Risorgimento*, ed. Albert Russell Ascoli and Krystyna von Henneberg (Oxford and New York, 2001), 103-18; and Peter Stamatov, 'Interpretive Activism and the Political Uses of Verdi's Operas in the 1840s', *American Sociological Review*, 67/3 (2002), 345-66. For a more or less strenuous support of the traditional view, see George W. Martin, 'Verdi, Politics, and "Va, pensiero": The Scholars Squabble', *The Opera Quarterly*, 21/1 (2005), 109-32; and Philip Gossett, "'Edizioni distrutte" and the Significance of Operatic Choruses During the Risorgimento', in *Opera and Society in Italy and France from Monteverdi to Bourdieu*, ed. Victoria Johnson, Jane F. Fulcher and Thomas Ertman (Cambridge, 2007), 181-242. Literature on Verdi, as well as Italian opera, and the Risorgimento, nevertheless continues to grow; see *Opera and Nation in Nineteenth-Century Italy*, ed. Axel Körner, and *Mediating the Risorgimento*, ed. Massimo Riva and John A. Davis, special issues of *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 17/4 (2012) and 18/2 (2013).

⁶ See Parker, "*Arpa d'or dei fatidici vati*", and Parker, 'Verdi politico: A Wounded Cliché Regroups', *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 17/4 (2012), 427-36; on another early opera by Verdi, and for a different position on the topic, see Douglas L. Ipson, 'Attila Takes Rome: the Reception of Verdi's Opera on the Eve of Revolution', *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 21/3 (2010), 249-56.

⁷ See, for instance, some of the work by Andreas Giger: 'Social Control and the Censorship of Giuseppe Verdi's Operas in Rome (1844-1859)', *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 11/3 (1999), 233-66, and 'Behind the Police Chief's Closed Doors: The Unofficial Censors of Verdi in Rome', *Nineteenth-Century Music Review*, 7/2 (2010), 63-99. For an overview of theatre censorship in Italy, see John A. Davis, 'Italy', in *The Frightful Stage: Political Censorship of the Theater in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, ed. Robert Justin Goldstein (New York and Oxford, 2009), 190-227, and Irene Piazzoni, *Spettacolo, istituzioni e società nell'Italia postunitaria (1860-1882)* (Rome, 2001), 135-215.

music librettos in which one could read allusions to Italy's political situation.⁸

Birgit Pauls has made perhaps the most comprehensive attempt at analysing various aspects of the composer's political image as it was codified throughout the mid-nineteenth to the twentieth century. More recently, Mary Ann Smart has made praiseworthy efforts to renew a constructive discussion by calling for a revaluation, in the first place, of our own understandings of – and ways of engaging with – the 'political' in opera.⁹

Over the last decade, debates about the construction of Verdi's *risorgimentale* myth, and more generally about the place of opera within the political culture of mid-nineteenth-century Italy, have met with an array of new approaches introduced by the so-called 'new history of the Risorgimento' – particularly by its pioneer Alberto Mario Banti. In a string of studies of Italian patriotic and nationalist discourse, Banti has developed his notion of a 'Risorgimento canon': a collection of literary, musical and figurative works featuring recurrent images and themes that would have had enormous emotional appeal for the masses and that would have functioned as a tool for large-scale political mobilisation.¹⁰ The merits of Banti's cultural approach to Risorgimento history, especially the historian's role in the revaluation of nationalism as a key

⁸ See in particular Gossett, "Edizioni distrutte". Verdi's epistolary statements, some of which show his interest in and excitement for the political events of the 1840s, are also often relied upon in order to prove his commitment to conveying patriotic ideals through his early operas. Particularly famous is his letter to Francesco Maria Piave of 28 April 1848, repr. in Mary Jane Phillips-Matz, *Verdi: A Biography* (Oxford and New York, 1993), 230-1.

⁹ Pauls, *Giuseppe Verdi und das Risorgimento*; Mary Ann Smart, 'Magical Thinking, Reason and Emotion in Some Recent Literature on Verdi and Politics', *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 17/4 (2012), 437-47, and by the same author, 'How Political were Verdi's Operas? Metaphors of Progress in the Reception of *I Lombardi alla prima crociata*', *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 18/2 (2013), 190-204. Smart's forthcoming book *Waiting for Verdi: Opera and Political Opinion in Italy, 1815-1848* (The University of California Press) promises to bring further new insights into these debates. For another valuable attempt, based on such notions as *passione* and *slancio*, at explaining possible resonances of Verdi's early musical language with the political mood of the time, see Susan Rutherford, "'Il grido dell'anima" or "un modo di sentire": Verdi, Masculinity and the Risorgimento', *Studi verdiani*, 19 (2005), 107-21.

¹⁰ See Alberto Mario Banti, *La nazione del Risorgimento: parentela, santità e onore alle origini dell'Italia unita* (Turin, 2000), esp. 44-5 and 53. See also Alberto Mario Banti and Paul Ginsborg, 'Per una nuova storia del Risorgimento', in *Storia d'Italia*, Annali 22, *Il Risorgimento*, ed. Alberto Mario Banti and Paul Ginsborg (Turin, 2007), xxiii-xli; and some of Banti's later publications: *Nel nome dell'Italia: il Risorgimento nelle testimonianze, nei documenti e nelle immagini*, ed. Alberto Mario Banti (Rome and Bari, 2010), and *Sublime madre nostra: la nazione italiana dal Risorgimento al fascismo* (Rome and Bari, 2011).

motivator of the processes that led to Unification, have been acknowledged by many, as have some of the questions his analysis leaves open.¹¹

With regard to the implications of Banti's claims for opera scholarship, I have raised elsewhere the problem of 'emotions': of the fact that Banti's (not always substantiated) emphasis on the role of the latter in the spread of nationalist ideologies may risk reinforcing common notions of opera and *italianità* as underpinned by the centrality of 'passions' and 'feelings'.¹² Such conjunctions become particularly dangerous if handled uncritically, and a-historically, in scholarly accounts of the responses produced by given opera performances among their audiences: audiences about whom we usually know little or nothing; but at the same time audiences that need to be given greater bearing, alongside musical and literary texts, in studies that explore how operatic 'meaning' is created. True, Banti has hardly addressed opera in his various studies of the morphology of Risorgimento discourse; but his emphasis on the linguistic and rhetorical aspects of the few opera plots and librettos he examines, as well as his negligence when it comes to discussing their actual reception, provide new material and intellectual challenges for opera scholars.¹³

One such challenge, as yet mostly unaddressed, consists of coming to terms with Banti's (and others') chronologically far-reaching approach: the tendency to privilege assumptions concerning nationalist discourse that stretch over a lengthy period (a chronological framework implied, or even required by Banti's notion of a *canon* of patriotic texts), rather than explorations of more circumscribed cultural-historical milieux. Several scholars have recently called for greater historical specificity. A number of subtle methodological considerations about the stakes of

¹¹ On Banti and the 'new history of the Risorgimento', see 'Alberto Banti's Interpretation of Risorgimento Nationalism: A Debate', ed. Axel Körner and Lucy Riall, *Nations and Nationalism*, 15/3 (2009), 396-460, and Silvana Patriarca and Lucy Riall, 'Introduction: Revisiting the Risorgimento', in *The Risorgimento Revisited: Nationalism and Culture in Nineteenth-Century Italy*, ed. Silvana Patriarca and Lucy Riall (Basingstoke, 2012), 1-17.

¹² See my 'Review-Article: A Passion for Italy', *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 23/3 (2011), 191-200. On the role of emotions in Banti's history of the Risorgimento, see also Lucy Riall, 'Nation, "Deep Images" and the Problem of Emotions', *Nations and Nationalism*, 15/3 (2009), 402-9.

¹³ In studies of opera and the Risorgimento, historians' emphasis often fall almost exclusively on literary texts and the political metaphors they may include; see, for instance, Carlotta Sorba, *Teatri: l'Italia del melodramma nell'età del Risorgimento* (Bologna, 2001), esp. 190-209. The influence of Banti's work on opera scholarship is evident in Simonetta Chiappini, 'La voce della martire. Dagli "evirati cantori" all'eroina romantica', in *Storia d'Italia*, Annali 22, *Il Risorgimento*, 289-328.

opera scholarship have been raised by Smart, in an article that contains valuable suggestions about new directions in which this scholarship could develop.¹⁴

Another challenge lies in implementing studies of opera reception. Verdi studies has for some time seen a growth of such investigations, as Parker and Smart remarked in the aftermath of the 2001 Verdi anniversary. This has happened in the wake of the wider ‘cultural turn’ in musicology and the humanities more generally. For the most part, nevertheless – perhaps with the exception of their discussion of Anselm Gerhard’s and Uwe Schweikert’s colossal *Verdi Handbuch* – the two musicologists’ main focus in their recent overview was on how literature (revisionist and other) about ‘Verdi politico’ has flourished since the role of the composer as a key Risorgimento figure during the 1840s has been called into question.¹⁵ Two volumes published by Brepols in 2013 testify to the growing body of research into the reception of Verdi’s music and figure outside Italy.¹⁶ But even after the latest (2013) Verdi celebrations, studies investigating nineteenth-century Verdi reception from perspectives other than the composer’s association with the Risorgimento remain – as far as the Italian scene is concerned – altogether spare.¹⁷

What *has* thrived over the last few years are locative studies, mostly in the form of ‘archaeological’ endeavours aimed at exhuming comprehensive collections of contemporary reviews from specific places. Luigi Verdi’s book on Bologna and Roberto Iovino’s and Stefano Verdino’s analogue for Genoa are the best examples for the Italian case; Hervé Gartioux’s scanning of the Parisian press has yielded invaluable primary source materials for the scholar of Verdi reception in the French

¹⁴ See Smart, ‘Magical Thinking’. I have also commented on some of the risks of chronologically far-reaching analyses in my ‘Review-Article’. Further studies that call for closer examination of specific historical milieux include Rosselli, *The Life of Verdi*, 73; and, with respect to Banti’s work, Axel Körner, ‘The Risorgimento’s Literary *Canon* and the Aesthetics of Reception: Some Methodological Considerations’, and Maurizio Isabella, ‘Emotions, Rationality and Political Intentionality in Patriotic Discourse’, both in *Nations and Nationalism*, 15/3 (2009), 410-18 and 427-33.

¹⁵ Roger Parker and Mary Ann Smart, ‘Verdi, 2001 and Us’, *Studi verdiani*, 18 (2004), 295-312, and *Verdi Handbuch*, ed. Anselm Gerhard and Uwe Schweikert (Stuttgart, 2001).

¹⁶ *Verdi Reception*, ed. Lorenzo Frassà and Michela Niccolai (Turnhout, 2013), and *Viva V.E.R.D.I.: Music from Risorgimento to the Unification of Italy*, ed. Roberto Illiano (Turnhout, 2013).

¹⁷ A recent exception, even though not entirely a study in reception history, is Susan Rutherford’s *Verdi, Opera, Women* (Cambridge, 2013), which explores Verdi’s female characters in relation to the position of women in nineteenth-century Italian society.

capital.¹⁸ On the foreign-reception front, a number of publications addressing processes of ‘naturalisation’ of Verdi’s music and persona within the local cultures and societies have also appeared in recent years: most notably Gundula Kreuzer’s *Verdi and the Germans*, and, for England, work by Roberta Montemorra Marvin.¹⁹

Overall, then, studies of particular local milieux have gained a secure place in Verdi and opera scholarship. (Emilio Sala’s book on *La traviata* and Paris, though less a study of reception than one of the musical and cultural background to Verdi’s composition of the opera, is another example.²⁰) Yet for Italy we still lack detailed explorations of Verdi, and more broadly opera, reception from local perspectives, particularly with regard to the nexus between urban discourses and understandings of *italianità*. Alexandra Wilson’s *The Puccini Problem* provides a thorough account of Puccini’s operas within the context of late-nineteenth- to early-twentieth-century Italian nation-building; but again the book lacks any specific local focus.²¹ Indeed, attempts at localising investigations of opera and Italian identity are so far limited almost exclusively to the work of Axel Körner (on Bologna) and Jutta Toelle (on Milan, particularly on La Scala).²²

In the next part of this chapter, then, I will seek to respond to some of the challenges outlined above, by developing a case study of Verdi reception in a local as well as chronologically-focused milieu. I shall concentrate on a particular

¹⁸ *Le opere di Giuseppe Verdi a Bologna (1843-1901)*, ed. Luigi Verdi (Lucca, 2001); *Giuseppe Verdi, genovese*, ed. Roberto Iovino and Stefano Verdino (Lucca, 2000); *La réception de Verdi en France: anthologie de la presse 1845-1894*, ed. Hervé Gartioux, (Weinsberg, 2001); *Giuseppe Verdi, Les vêpres siciliennes: Dossier de presse parisienne (1855)*, ed. Hervé Gartioux (Heilbronn, 1995); and *Giuseppe Verdi, Don Carlos: Dossier de presse parisienne (1867)*, ed. Harvé Gartioux (Heilbronn, 1997).

¹⁹ Gundula Kreuzer, *Verdi and the Germans: From Unification to the Third Reich* (Cambridge, 2010); Roberta Montemorra Marvin, ‘The Censorship of Verdi’s Operas in Victorian London’, *Music & Letters*, 82/4 (2001), 582-610, and ‘Verdian Opera Burlesqued: A Glimpse into Mid-Victorian Theatrical Culture’, *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 15/1 (2003), 33-66. For France, see also Hervé Gartioux, ‘La réception des opéras de Verdi en France, entre 1845 et 1867, à travers une analyse de la presse’, 2 vols. (Ph.D. diss., Université de Paris III, 1999), and for England, see also Chloe Valenti, ‘Verdi Reception in London, 1842-1877’ (Ph.D. diss., University of Cambridge, 2010). For some considerations on studies of Verdi reception outside Italy, see Claudio Vellutini, ‘Review-Article: Verdi Beyond Verdi’, *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 25/3 (2013), 319-28.

²⁰ Emilio Sala, *The Sounds of Paris in Verdi’s La traviata* (Cambridge, 2013).

²¹ Alexandra Wilson, *The Puccini Problem: Opera, Nationalism and Modernity* (Cambridge, 2007).

²² Axel Körner, *Politics of Culture in Liberal Italy: From Unification to Fascism* (New York and London, 2009), and Jutta Toelle, *Bühne der Stadt: Mailand und das Teatro alla Scala zwischen Risorgimento und Fin de Siècle* (München and Wien, 2009). See, however, also Carlos del Cueto, ‘Opera in 1860s Milan and the End of the Rossinian Tradition’ (Ph.D. diss., University of Cambridge, 2011).

moment in the emergence of Verdi's political myth: the years 1859-61. This period saw not only the completion of the first phase of Italian Unification (in February 1861), but also the development of a political aura surrounding the composer as the result of his increasing association with the cause, and later achievement, of Italian independence. The 'Viva VERDI' episode, Verdi's trip to Turin (in his role as a member of the Parma deputation) in September 1859 to meet Vittorio Emanuele, and the composer's election to the first Italian parliament in 1861: all these facts contributed to this phenomenon. So, increasingly from that time onwards, did retrospective re-readings of Verdi's early operas (particularly the choruses of *Nabucco*, *I Lombardi alla prima crociata* and *Ernani*) as signposts to Italians' political-cultural 'resurgence' through emancipation from foreign rule. While this chapter draws mostly on source material from 1859-61, and adopts a specifically Milanese focus for at least part of the discussion, a number of passages from later Italian publications – ones dating into the early 1880s – appear in Appendix 2. This (by no means exhaustive) collection of extracts allows a grasp of various political tropes concerning the composer as they emerged during the chronological period spanned by this thesis.

Throughout this chapter, my main aim is to foreground opposing claims and rhetorical differences. The more-or-less conscious 'emplotment' – to borrow a term that has for some time been in vogue among historiographers – by nineteenth- and twentieth-century writers of several Verdi-related events into a narrative asserting the composer's contribution to Italy's Risorgimento has caused much of the plurality of contemporary discourses to be lost. The myth has not only clouded historical facts, it has also obscured certain voices in order to let others emerge more forcefully; it has effaced nuances in tone and dissenting opinions for the sake of a more coherent and self-explanatory account of Verdi's and Italy's intertwining achievements.²³ Engaging with mid-nineteenth-century reports on Verdi and his relation to Italian political events promises to retrieve this broader spectrum of responses. It will disclose a greater diversity – chronological, geographical and, so

²³ Within historiography, the concept of 'emplotment' was first applied by Hayden White in his *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore and London, 1975), and developed in his *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore and London, 1978).

to speak, topical – in accounts of Verdi’s political reverberations during the period. A closer look at primary source materials, in other words, can return us to a more kaleidoscopic image of ‘Verdi politico’: an image that may call our attention, away from the ‘grand narrative’ of Verdi’s all-pervading *risorgimentale* prestige, to stories of operatic failures, to the writings of little-known individuals, or to unexpected silences and counterarguments looming deep within the Italian press.

Chronological disjunctions

My first port of call in this gallery of 1859-61 Verdian pictures will be reports of the ‘Viva VERDI’ slogan. The most thorough investigation of this phenomenon in Italy is by Michael Sawall, who has demonstrated how the acrostic began to make its way across the North of the country around the end of December 1858, and was popular during the early months of 1859.²⁴ Sawall has identified a number of contemporary reports that testify to the use of the slogan, ones found mostly in Piedmontese papers (which were not subject to the same political censorship at work in other Italian states). The following is a collection of passages referring to the acrostic from Italian papers dating from 1858-59. The list integrates Sawall’s findings (S) with the results of additional research of my own:

NEWS FROM FLORENCE, 27 DECEMBER, IN *CORRIERE MERCANTILE*, 30 DECEMBER 1858, 2 (S).

L’entusiasmo per il Piemonte e pel leale suo Principe cresce ogni dì più; locché mette in grande pensiero quei di Palazzo Vecchio e di Pitti. Il saluto dei Toscani è di *viva Verdi*, sotto cui si nasconde *Viva Vittorio Emanuele Re D’Italia* (V.E.R.D.I.), è un’imitazione artificiosa dell’I.N.R.I. del Nazzareno.

NEWS FROM MODENA, IN *L’OPINIONE*, 12 JANUARY 1859, 3 (S).

I muri delle nostre case fanno l’ufficio dei giornali, ed i nomi di Vittorio Emanuele, di Cavour, di La Marmora ecc. vi sono iscritti sopra. La gioventù specialmente, ha ora di continuo in bocca il nome di Verdi, poiché questo fortunato nome, colle lettere che lo compongono, forma l’ardente voto di tutti quelli che vogliono Vittorio Emanuele re d’Italia.

NEWS FROM MILAN, IN *L’OPINIONE*, 18 JANUARY 1859, 3 (S).

Sopra le mura della città si veggono di continuo le iscrizioni di: *Viva l’Italia! Viva Verdi!* La polizia manda tutte le notti intorno una mano de’ suoi agenti per cancellarle; ma nella giornata dopo le iscrizioni tornano a farsi a lettere più cubitali.

²⁴ Michael Sawall, “‘VIVA V.E.R.D.I.’: origine e ricezione di un simbolo nazionale nell’anno 1859”, in *Verdi 2001: Atti del convegno internazionale, Parma, New York, New Haven, 24 gennaio-1° febbraio 2001*, ed. Fabrizio Della Seta, Roberta Montemorra Marvin and Marco Marica, 2 vols. (Florence, 2003), I, 123-31.

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NEWS FROM FERRARA, 31 JANUARY, IN *L'UNIONE*, QUOTED FROM *CORRIERE MERCANTILE*, 4 FEBRUARY 1859, 2.

Furon sentiti anche qui con giubilo gli sponsali conclusi tra l'amabile figlia del caro *Verdi* ed il principe Napoleone, e da ciò ne speriamo infiniti beni!

LÉOUZON-LEDUC, 'LA CRISE ITALIENNE', *LA PRESSE*, TRANSLATED IN AND QUOTED FROM *CORRIERE MERCANTILE*, 17 FEBRUARY 1859, 2-3.

E' un fatto molto notevole, l'influenza del Piemonte su tutta l'Italia. Egli vede adunarsi intorno a sé quelli stessi che lo aveano in sospetto, e che lo respingevano con più energia. *Viva Verdi!* tale è, come è noto, il grido simbolico che risuona da un punto all'altro della penisola. Splendido simbolo, se non d'una unità impossibile forse, almeno d'un accordo generale, che porta sulla sua bandiera questa significativa divisa: *Indipendenza e libertà!* [...] Che cosa è mai questo grido universale di *Viva Verdi!* se non la parola d'ordine dell'indipendenza?

L'UOMO DI PIETRA, 2 JULY 1859, 153.

Al Carcano avremo la *Battaglia di Legnano* di Verdi a beneficio dei feriti alleati. Evviva Verdi! Il Verdi effettivo e il Verdi simbolico che colle cifre fatali era la disperazione della politica austriaca!

GAZZETTA DEL POPOLO, 15 SEPTEMBER 1859, 1 (S).

Fra gli ambasciatori parmensi vedremo con piacere il maestro *Verdi*, alla cui celebrità europea i suoi concittadini hanno voluto giustamente rendere un tale omaggio. *Viva Verdi!* era il grido simbolico dei liberali nelle provincie oppresse, prima dello scoppio della guerra. Quel grido ha reso tanti servigi alla causa italiana, che ben è giusto finalmente che il possessore del nome di *Verdi* si goda in Torino un evviva per proprio conto, dopo averne ricevuti tanti per conto di Vittorio Emanuele *Re D'Italia*.

NEWS FROM TURIN, 16 SEPTEMBER, IN *IL CREPUSCOLO*, 18 SEPTEMBER 1859, 270 (S).

[I membri delle deputazioni di Parma e Modena] Furono acclamatissimi, massime il Verdi, il cui nome fu il simbolo del nostro risorgimento nelle provincie oppresse, ed il cui genio esprime sè bene i grandi affetti di patria e di libertà.

L'UOMO DI PIETRA, 17 SEPTEMBER 1859, 261.

Il suo nome [di Verdi] servì per parecchi mesi di zimbello, di copertoio, di maschera: i più arrabbiati anti-verdiani, i signori della musica classica e della musica dell'avvenire, gridavano a squarciagola: *Viva Verdi!* non pensando che alle sue care iniziali Vittorio Emanuele **Re Di Italia**.

IL TROVATORE, 21 SEPTEMBER 1859, 2.

I deputati giungeranno alle 6 e mezzo di questa sera; poi interverranno alla rappresentazione del massimo teatro, illuminato: ivi uno dei deputati parmensi, Giuseppe Verdi, sarà certo fatto segno di duplice ovazione, rappresentando egli l'indipendenza e la musica italiana, e perché le lettere che compongono il suo chiaro nome erano sigle di un motto che non si avverò finora, ma noi grideremo ancora VIVA VERDI!

V[ITTORIO] BERSEZIO, IN *GAZZETTA PIEMONTESE*, 22 SEPTEMBER 1859, 1-2 (S).

Nel cominciamento dell'attuale moto italico, sotto l'oppressione del regime straniero, il popolo arguto di Lombardia aveva tolto il nome dell'illustre maestro come simbolo e manifestazione politica. Le lettere che compongono il nome di lui [...] esprimevano il voto e la speranza di tutti.

It appears that most of these reports date either from early 1859 or from September 1859: the time when the acrostic was at its greatest popularity (during a period of increasing political agitation in northern Italy), and the time immediately following Verdi's trip to Turin as part of the Parma deputation (who were operating for the province to be annexed to Piedmont-Sardinia). As Pauls has noted, a new boom in notoriety for the slogan followed Verdi's death in January 1901: this was, quite probably, when the 'Viva VERDI' episode became widely known.²⁵ But further research reveals that the acrostic also maintained currency in Italians' memory during an earlier period, as this second collection of references to the slogan from later in the century suggests:

MARC MONNIER, *L'ITALIA È LA TERRA DEI MORTI?* (NAPLES, 1860), 216-17, FN. 1.

Questi stratagemmi di guerra e queste parole velate fanno la delizia degli Italiani e se ne servono sovente nelle loro opposizioni politiche. Così a Milano, nello scorso autunno, il grido di *Viva VERDI* voleva dire *Viva VITTORIO EMANUELE, RE D'ITALIA*. [Originally published in French in Marc Monnier, *L'Italie est-elle la terre des morts?* (Paris, 1860), 183, fn. 1.]

ANT FERRARI, *I MISTERI D'ITALIA O GLI ULTIMI SUOI SEDICI ANNI, 1849-1864*, 3 VOLS. (VENICE, 1865-67), II (1865), 74.

Per vero dire in moltissimi teatri d'Italia, in quegli ultimi giorni di carnevale [del 1857], venivano oltre l'usato applaudite le opere del maestro Verdi. E ciò non per la divina musica che le informava, non per la loro perfetta esecuzione, ma sibbene perché i popoli avevano scorto nel cognome *Verdi* una allegoria tutta affatto politica. Questo cognome *Verdi* dunque aveva il seguente significato:

V	E	R	D	I
<i>Vittorio</i>	<i>Emanuele</i>	<i>Re</i>	<i>D'</i>	<i>Italia</i>

Epperò quando i pubblici assistenti ad un'opera in musica nei teatri, si accordavano fra loro ed entusiasticamente gridavano *Viva Verdi*, intendevano di gridare: *Viva Vittorio Emanuele Re d'Italia!* Ed anche i pezzi musicali che passarono sempre non curati, in quei tempi invece avevano la loro apoteosi col solito accarezzato grido: *Viva Verdi!* Quanto è ingegnoso il sentimento di nazionalità e d'indipendenza in un popolo!

[Ferrari incorrectly dates the episode to 1857.]

F. S., IN *GAZZETTA PIEMONTESE*, 22 JANUARY 1872, 1.

V'ha a cui non garbano quegli atteggiamenti, quegli impeti e quegli scatti, quelle rabbie che dimostrò quivi e altrove il Verdi. Ma si mettano in lui, si riportino al 1842, ma pensino a quel che n'è derivato e a cui produrre contribuirono anco un poco le note del Verdi. E se un giorno si gridò *Viva Verdi*, con certe intenzioni non puramente artistiche, ciò non fu soltanto per la

²⁵ According to Pauls, this new peak in notoriety was largely due to the publication, in a special issue of *L'illustrazione italiana* from February 1901, of a picture showing a man writing the words 'VIVA VERDI' on a wall. The picture was published as part of an album where photographic and lithographic images, the latter often subtitled *disegno dal vero*, were freely mixed; see Pauls, *Giuseppe Verdi und das Risorgimento*, 251. The acrostic was also recalled in the Verdi commemorations held by the Italian Parliament at the end of January; see the speeches reprinted in Eugenio Checchi, *G. Verdi (1813-1901)* (Florence, 1901), 229-42.

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ragione che le sigle componenti quel nome suonassero per appunto: Vittorio Emanuele Re d'Italia.

F. UDA, IN *LA LOMBARDIA*, 14 JULY 1874, 1.

...quest'opera [*I Lombardi alla prima crociata*] che or sono trenta anni aveva fatto battere tanti cuori e creato a metà colla Rivoluzione le famose Cinque Giornate – quest'opera petroliera dei suoi tempi, che faceva gridare *Viva Verdi*, facendo impallidire l'Austria che nel cognome dell'illustre maestro ravvisava le temute iniziali del *Re d'Italia*...

LUIGIA CODEMO, *PAGINE FAMIGLIARI, ARTISTICHE, CITTADINE (1750-1850)* (VENICE, 1875), 315-16.

Tale era l'Italia negli anni, che precedettero il 48. Essendo stato mio padre dall'Ateneo di Treviso nominato a rappresentarlo al congresso di Napoli, noi partimmo nell'agosto del 1845, e ci avviammo alla bella Partenope. Non si può descrivere quale aspetto di profonda pace, di serenità incomparabile avesse in quel tempo nella sua abituale magnificenza la vita italiana; ossia la vita morale, sociale, artistica: la prosperità dei campi, la quiete degli animi; invano la penna tenta interpretare lo splendore di tanta pace, in questi ricordi... Bensì vedo cogli occhi dello spirito in quell'estate i paeselli per cui si transitava e mi rimane l'impressione che ogni giorno fosse festa. Su pei muri scritto: *Viva VERDI*: per le strade, nei lieti convegni sento a cantare il coro dei *Lombardi*: nei dopo pranzo le bande percorrere allegramente le vie, in mezzo allo spensierato buon umore di popoli, a cui parevano ignote le passioni, che più tardi li portarono a così seri destini.

[It is unclear whether Codemo is referring to the acrostic episode. Despite the incorrect dating – she is recalling facts from the 1840s – this could be possible, since this kind of mistake was recurrent in writings from the period.]

ARTHUR POUGIN, *VITA ANEDDOTICA DI VERDI*, CON NOTE ED AGGIUNTE DI FOLCHETTO, ED. MARCELLO CONATI (FLORENCE, 2001 [1881]), 117-18.

Negli anni 1859 e 1860, durante tutto il corso di quella guerra dell'indipendenza italiana che cominciò coll'aiuto delle armi francesi, dalla liberazione della Lombardia e continuò col riscatto della Toscana, dei ducati e del regno di Napoli, il nome di un grande artista si trovò formato in modo da poter servire di simbolo e di grido d'affratellamento fra le popolazioni che volevano affrancarsi da un despotismo secolare e concorrere all'unificazione della patria comune. Quali pur siano le barriere frapposte alla libertà, i popoli oppressi hanno sempre dei mezzi ingegnosi per far conoscere il loro pensiero. In tali circostanze gli Italiani non trovarono di meglio che di servirsi del nome di un Italiano, di un compositore che da quindici anni regnava sovrano su tutte le scene della penisola e la cui fama era universale. Impiegando questo nome in certa guida come rebus, la cui chiave era del resto facile a trovarsi, coprivano tutti i muri della seguente iscrizione laconica che dava lo scatto ai loro desideri e alle loro speranze:

VIVA V.E.R.D.I.

il che voleva dire in buon italiano:

VIVA VITTORIO EMANUELE RE D'ITALIA.

È in tal modo che si esprimevano i compatrioti del grande maestro e che, ovunque si trovasse l'iscrizione fatidica, si poteva rendersi conto dei loro sentimenti.

[Originally published in French in *Le Ménestrel*, 3 March 1878, 105.]

FOLCHETTO [ALIAS JACOPO CAPONI], IN POUGIN, *VITA ANEDDOTICA*, 115, FN. 7.

Intanto l'agitazione cresceva [a Napoli nei primi mesi del 1858]. Verdi non poteva uscire dall'albergo senza essere seguito dalla folla che lo acclamava e che alzava quel grido di *viva Verdi* a doppio significato che tutti conoscono. Per far cessare questa effervescenza, il governo napoletano decise di sciogliere il maestro dal suo obbligo e di lasciarlo partire con la sua opera.

CHAPTER ONE

D.^R V. [ALIAS LEONE FORTIS], IN *IL PUNGOLO* [1887], QUOTED FROM 'OTELLO', *DRAMMA LIRICO IN QUATTRO ATTI, VERSI DI ARRIGO BOITO, MUSICA DI GIUSEPPE VERDI: GIUDIZI DELLA STAMPA ITALIANA E STRANIERA* (MILAN, 1887), 24.

...*Viva Verdi!* Questo grido, trent'anni or sono, ebbe la fortuna di riassumere nell'aggregazione delle sue lettere, tutte le aspirazioni nazionali del nostro popolo – iersera questo grido riassumeva tutti i ricordi della sua gloria artistica, tutte le aspirazioni di mantenerne intatto l'antico ed eterno splendore.

L[EO]NE FORTIS, 'IL VECCHIO MAESTRO', IN *GAZZETTA MUSICALE DI MILANO*, 7 DECEMBER 1890, 773-5, 773.

VIVA VERDI – questo grido che sulla fine del 1858 e sul principio del 1859 echeggiò da un capo all'altro d'Italia – che pareva allora lo scoppio di un petardo carico di speranze patriottiche – e faceva trasalire ogni cuore italiano, perché l'acclamazione al più grande dei nostri artisti era ad un tempo un acrostico rivoluzionario e voleva dire **Viva Vittorio Emanuele Re D'Italia** – si eleva ora un'altra volta da tutte le città italiane all'annuncio che il sommo maestro non ha per anco chiuso la sua gloriosa carriera, e ch'egli ha ancora tale gagliardia, tale robustezza nella mente e nel cuore da tentare una impresa tanto nobile quanto difficile – la resurrezione dell'opera buffa italiana – e adesso in quel grido c'è uno scoppio di speranze artistiche, che si ispirano anch'esse ad un sentimento, sempre vivo nell'animo dell'Italia – il sentimento nazionale.

DOMENICO BIMA, IN *GAZZETTA MUSICALE DI MILANO*, 14 DECEMBER 1890, 800.

[See Figure 1.1]

ANTON GIULIO BARRILI, *GIUSEPPE VERDI. VITA E OPERE* (GENOA, 1892), 106.

Il conte di Siracusa, fratello del re, amico degli artisti e non vano ostentatore di sentimenti liberali, si offerse intermediario, per presentare il Verdi a Ferdinando II, e ottenere in quel modo che fosse tolto il divieto alle rappresentazioni dell'opera [*Un ballo in maschera*]. Il maestro non volle saperne di presentazioni, giustamente pensando che l'udienza reale, non riuscendo ad ottenergli il *nulla osta*, avrebbe potuto obbligarlo, per debito di cortesia, a cambiamenti essenziali, e perciò ad uno strazio dell'opera. Si seppe questo, e gli animi si riscaldarono sempre più in favor suo: usciva dall'albergo, e la folla lo seguiva, gridando: *viva Verdi!* Quel «viva Verdi» era già un grido politico, a Napoli; qualche mese più tardi, a Roma, scritto sulle cantonate, e debitamente punteggiato tra le lettere del nome (viva V.E.R.D.I.) doveva significare un voto dei cuori, un plebiscito anticipato di tutte le città italiane, acclamanti a Vittorio Emanuele re d'Italia.

It is not on purely quantitative or chronological matters, though, that I wish to focus here. One could, for example, gain further and perhaps more productive insights by comparing data concerning the spread of the slogan in Italy and abroad. It is notable, for example, that almost none of Verdi's early Italian biographers mention 'Viva VERDI': not even some of the most strenuous supporters of what had by the 1870s or 1880s emerged as Verdi's *risorgimentale* image judged the acrostic episode crucial to a thorough account of the private and public life of the composer. On the other hand, a number of foreign writers do call attention to 'Viva

VERDI' in their biographical portraits of the musician.²⁶ This divergence alone raises some pivotal questions worth exploring in the future: questions concerning the possibility of different patterns of construction and consumption of Verdi's political persona in Italy and abroad; questions where matters of not only chronological but also geographical borders and their traversing come into play.²⁷

There is, however, a further element of variation, one intrinsic in those nineteenth-century Italian reports, that is more pertinent to this study, concentrating, as it does, on the Italian context: the modulations in tone with which the early-1859 and the late-1859 press articles envelop the information pertaining to the slogan. The earlier reports are driven by an attachment to the present – and to

²⁶ The nineteenth-century (post-1859) biographies and biographical sketches of Verdi I have examined are the following (the titles with asterisks contain references to 'Viva VERDI'). In Italian: Francesco Regli, 'Verdi Giuseppe', in Regli, *Dizionario biografico dei più celebri poeti ed artisti melodrammatici, tragici e comici, maestri, concertisti, coreografi, mimi, ballerini, scenografi, giornalisti, impresarii, ecc. ecc. che fiorirono in Italia dal 1800 al 1860* (Turin, 1860), 550-3; Michele Lessona, 'Parma. Giuseppe Verdi', in Lessona, *Volere è potere* (Florence, 1869), 287-307; Giuseppe Perosio, *Cenni biografici su Giuseppe Verdi, seguiti da breve analisi dell'opera Aida e della Messa da Requiem* (Milan, 1876); Ercole Cavalli, 'Giuseppe Verdi: nuovi particolari inediti e interessanti', *Il pensiero di Nizza*, 29, 30, 31 December 1876 and 4 January 1877; Gino Monaldi, *Verdi e le sue opere* (Florence, 1877); Felice Venosta, 'L'esordire di Verdi a Milano: memorie inedite', *La Lombardia*, 22, 23 and 25 March 1881; Arthur Pougin*, *Vita aneddotica di Verdi*, con note ed aggiunte di Folchetto, ed. Marcello Conati (Florence, 2001 [1881]); Eugenio Checchi, *Giuseppe Verdi: il genio e le opere* (Firenze, 1887); Anton Giulio Barrili*, *Giuseppe Verdi: vita e opere* (Genoa, 1892); and Gino Monaldi, *Verdi nella vita e nell'arte: conversazioni verdiane* (Turin, 1899). In foreign languages: Anon., 'Giuseppe Verdi', in Anon., *Les grands et petits personnages du jour par un des plus petits: scènes d'intérieur de nos contemporains* (Paris, 1860), 1-16; Louis Gustave Vapereau*, *Dictionnaire universel des contemporains: contenant toutes les personnes notables de la France et des pays étrangers* (Paris, 1861 [1st edn. 1858]); Léon Escudier*, 'Giuseppe Verdi', in Escudier, *Mes souvenirs* (Paris, 1863), 69-96; Hercules Cavalli, 'José Verdi', in Cavalli, *Biografías artísticas contemporáneas de los célebres José Verdi, maestro de música, y Antonio Canova, escultor* (Madrid, 1867 [1st edn. in Italian, Montevideo, 1866]), 7-45, Italian translation in Mary Jane Phillips-Matz, *Verdi: il grande gentleman del piacentino* (Piacenza, 1992), 80-121; François-Joseph Fétis*, *Biographie universelle des musiciens et bibliographie générale de la musique*, 8 vols. (Paris, 1866-67 [1st edn. 1837-44]), VIII, 321-25; Félix Clément*, 'Verdi (Giuseppe)', in Clément, *Les Musiciens célèbres depuis le seizième siècle jusqu'à nos jours* (Paris, 1868), 615-26; Eduard Hanslick*, *Die Moderne Oper: Kritiken und Studien*, 9 vols. (Berlin, 1875-1900), I, 217-55; Arthur Pougin*, 'Verdi: Souvenirs Anecdóticos', *Le Ménestrel*, 16, 23 and 30 December 1877; 6, 13, 20 and 27 January; 3, 10 and 17 February; 3, 10, 17, 24 and 31 March; 7 and 14 April 1878; Maurice Cristal*, 'Verdi et les traditions nationales de la musique en Italie', *Bibliothèque universelle et revue Suisse*, 85/6 and 85/7 (1880), 385-409 and 66-101; Arthur Pougin*, *Verdi: Histoire anecdotique de sa vie et de ses œuvres* (Paris, 1886); Arthur Pougin*, *Verdi: An Anecdotic History of His Life and Works*, trans. from French by James E. Matthew (London, 1887); and Blanche Roosevelt*, *Verdi, Milan and Othello: Being a Short Life of Verdi, with Letters Written about Milan and the New Opera of Othello: Represented for the First Time on the Stage of La Scala Theatre, February 5, 1887* (London, 1887). For the acrostic's popularity in 1860s England, see Chloe Valenti, 'Adulation and Appropriation: The Emergence of Verdi's Political Image in 1860s England', in *Viva V.E.R.D.I.*, 175-97.

²⁷ For some recent historiographical approaches to the Risorgimento from a transnational perspective, see the bibliography in the Conclusion.

presence. They are underpinned by a desire to emphasise the slogan's ubiquitous and continuous proximity side by side with the political events that were then shaking various Italian cities. The acrostic is endowed with an active potential to contribute to, or at least stand symbolically for, political change, a process through which Verdi's individuality – the bearing of the man, the composer and his music – becomes obscured. By September of 1859, however, and as the past tense in the later reports registers, the patriotic cry belonged to the domain of memory, of historical writing about and of the past. Its recollection highlighted the changed political situation brought about by Italy's accomplishments in the Second War of Independence. The *status quo* in Lombardy and central Italy had eventually been questioned: Lombardy had been ceded to France and, as established by the armistice of Villafranca, would then be passed to Piedmont-Sardinia; the various provinces in central Italy were ruled by provisional governments demanding annexation to the same kingdom.

In the changed political circumstances – censorship of the press in Lombardy had been abolished on 31 July – even the Milanese newspaper *Il crepuscolo* found itself free to recall, with a clear sense of its pastness, the use of the acrostic from earlier that year. The report (already cited in the first list) reads as follows:

[I membri delle deputazioni di Parma e Modena] Furono acclamatisimi, massime il Verdi, il cui nome fu il simbolo del nostro risorgimento nelle provincie oppresse, ed il cui genio esprime sì bene i grandi affetti di patria e di libertà.²⁸

[[The members of the Parma and Modena deputations] were roundly acclaimed, particularly Verdi, whose name was the symbol of our resurgence in the downtrodden provinces, and whose genius expressed so well the great love of homeland and freedom.]

This passage is doubly interesting: for one thing, it foregrounds the backward-looking gaze from which the Risorgimento, specifically its musical 'appendages', had come to be viewed by late 1859; for another, it points to an early slippage of

²⁸ Correspondence from Turin, 16 September, in *Il crepuscolo*, 18 September 1859, 270. *Il crepuscolo* was one of the chief Milanese newspapers during the 1850s; it promoted a morally and politically active type of journalism. For an overview of journalism in Lombardy-Venetia during the period, see Franco Della Peruta, 'Il giornalismo dal 1847 all'Unità', in Alessandro Galante Garrone and Franco Della Peruta, *La stampa italiana del Risorgimento* (Rome and Bari, 1979), 247-569, esp. 519-36.

one aspect of ‘Verdi politico’ into another. Verdi has, first of all, been given back his name: no longer a metonymical device called upon to concoct presence – the presence of an envisaged Italian unity under the Savoy monarchy – ‘Verdi’ resumes more specific as well as more diverse significations.²⁹ It comes to designate the man whose name had served as a patriotic watchword in the oppressed Italian lands, as well as the composer whose music had spoken for the political sentiments of the Italian patriots. Other reports from the same period point in the same direction: a multiplication and increasing delineation of the political resonances engendered by the composer (who, more broadly, was seen as the greatest representative of Italian art abroad, and was further praised for his active contribution to Italian politics in his role as Parma deputy in Turin).

It is nevertheless the conflation of these various political attributes attached to Verdi that is most notable in these later reports. This is particularly clear in the passage from *Il crepuscolo*. The passage knits the perpetuation of the political aura of ‘Viva VERDI’ to the capacity of Verdi’s genius to translate into musical expression the political passions of his countrymen. The report points to an integration of different topical threads within the developing politics-focused discourse about the composer. The Verdi myth indeed has acted through history not only as a source of always new readings and (at times) overt political appropriations, but also as an historical and cultural configuration that originated from a reduction of complexity and fragmentariness of lived experience to one single narration. The multifaceted nature of Verdi’s nineteenth-century political image is nevertheless something worth recovering, for a variety of reasons.

Perhaps the altered tone of those late 1859 reports – a readjustment from the present to the past tense, and the different facets of ‘Verdi politico’ – is not too significant in itself. The implications of such a shift, however, are broader, since they intersect and potentially cast shadows on much literature about the role and meanings attached to Verdi’s operas during the Risorgimento. As mentioned earlier, scholarship has until recently often overlooked the instability of the cultural and political scaffolding assembled around these works at any specific moment in

²⁹ On metonymy as a device that concocts ‘presence in absence’ by way of connecting as well as juxtaposing different contexts, see Eelco Runia, ‘Presence’, *History and Theory*, 45/1 (2006), 1-29.

time. Assumptions concerning the ‘patriotic’ significance, during the early 1840s, of operas such as *Nabucco* and *I Lombardi* have rested on operations of backdating their later nationalist interpretations to earlier years. Yet, recent (post-Banti) accounts of the Risorgimento have called attention to its internal fragmentation as both a political and cultural phenomenon: they have highlighted not only some of the challenges posed by its conceptualisation as a widely popular mass movement, but also the instability of its political aims and equilibriums through the years.³⁰ Opera reception in many ways dovetails with the changeability and multiplicity of the larger political points of views; more than this, it adds a stratum of local consciousness to the shaping of composers, operatic works and performance events into objects capable of bearing broader, extra-musical significations.

Milanese anti-narratives

Milan at 1859-61 is a good case in point. The 1859 summer season at the Teatro Carcano included a ten-night run of performances of *La battaglia di Legnano*, the only opera Verdi composed with a clear patriotic theme in mind. The opera had received its premiere in Rome in January 1849, days before the proclamation of the Roman republic. July 1859 saw its Milanese premiere, which was organised in order to raise money for the wounded of the Austro-Piedmontese war. The work’s local reception is significant, particularly if compared to the responses the opera aroused about two years later when it was staged for the first time at La Scala.

In spite of the paucity of reviews (most theatrical journals had suspended publications owing to the military hostilities), *La battaglia* seems to have been warmly received in 1859, largely because of the plot’s resonances with the war, and the philanthropic purpose of the performances. One reviewer put this clearly:

Il pubblico scoppiò in applausi vivissimi, quando vide sventolare sulla scena le bandiere tricolori, e irruppe in grida di entusiasmo al giuramento dei cavalieri della morte *di vincere o di morire* per la liberazione d’Italia. Senza di questa, e se l’incasso (prelevate le spese) non fosse stato promesso ai *soldati feriti* dell’esercito italiano e francese, forse invece di applausi avremmo udito qualche fischio.³¹

³⁰ See, for instance, Riall, ‘Nation, “Deep Images”’, and by the same author, *Risorgimento: The History of Italy from Napoleon to Nation State* (Basingstoke and New York, 2009), esp. chapter six.

³¹ *Il trovatore*, 27 July 1859, 2. The journals *Don Marzio*, 6 August 1859, 69, and *La fama*, 26 July 1859, 188, also reported the opera’s overall positive reception.

[The audience broke out into the warmest applause when they saw the Italian flags waving on stage, and they cried out with enthusiasm at the death knights' oath to *either win or die* for the liberation of Italy. Without the latter, and if the takings (deducted the expenses) had not been promised to be allocated to the *wounded soldiers* of the Italian and French armies, perhaps we would have heard hisses rather than applauses.]

This was one of those instances, frequent but by no means all-pervasive, when a work based on a patriotic subject gained a favourable reception with an audience, or spurred demonstrations in the theatre, because of its resonances with the larger political context. So-called 'patriotic' operas and spoken plays were indeed an abundant part – and one often well received – of the entertainments on offer in Milan during and immediately after the war of 1859.³² But, as we shall see, it may be equally worth pausing over failures: wondering about political metaphors that did not come through; music and speech that fell flat; memories and sentiments that did not survive. The benefit of doing so lies in that some of the apparent inconsistencies and contradictions that clashing, and sometimes chronologically overlapping, discourses bring to the surface can open up new avenues for thought and interpretation.

Complaints about performances based on political subjects were, for instance, also heard aplenty in 1859 Milan. One reason for this, also true for 1848, was discontent with theatrical spectacle at a time when military and political events promised a much more powerful emotional experience.³³ Many critics lamented the endless use of patriotic themes in literary texts, as

³² Operas that were praised for their political allusions include: Achille Peri's *Giuditta* (see *Gazzetta dei teatri*, 27 March 1860, 65) and *Vittore Pisani* (see *Il pungolo*, 5 October 1860, 1119-20, and *La Lombardia*, 6 October 1860, 1); Antonio Buzzi's *La Lega lombarda* (see *GMM*, 8 January 1860, 11-12); and Giovanni Bottesini's *L'assedio di Firenze* (see *La perseveranza*, 7 September 1860, 1).

³³ See, for instance, the following comments: 'Milano non è più Milano. Tutto il suo cuore, tutti i suoi voti, tutte le sue preci sono rivolti alla guerra! Che importa adesso de' teatri, de' bagni, de' divertimenti e d'ogni qualsiasi novità e eccentricità! Ciò che commove, che entusiasma, che fa battere il sangue nelle arterie è il tuonar del cannone che preludia le vittorie': *Il corriere delle dame*, 28 June 1859, 198. 'Non è momento di entusiasmi teatrali, né questi spettacoli ne offrono il menomo motivo. L'unico spettacolo, che adesso riempie di meraviglia e di speranza, giova ripeterlo, è l'ordinamento legale, pacifico onde si costituisce l'Italia centrale': *Il corriere delle dame*, 10 September 1859, 272. In Genoa, a critic had remarked earlier during the year: 'ad altre cure intendono gli animi de' cittadini, e [...] i sentimenti degli spettatori non sono in armonia colle passioni espresse dagli artisti. – Quale rapporto infatti fra i *Crociati Lombardi* del Verdi e i *Lombardi crocefissi* da Giulay?': *Corriere mercantile*, 11 February 1859, 1. For a similar blurring of theatrical and political spectacle at key moments of political unrest, see Carlotta Sorba, 'Il 1848 e la melodrammatizzazione della politica', in *Storia d'Italia*, Annali 22, *Il Risorgimento*, 481-508, and Delphine Mordey, 'Music in Paris, 1870-1871' (Ph.D. diss, University of Cambridge, 2006).

well as the fact that some music resembled too closely patriotic compositions of the past (particularly those of 1848).³⁴ Their comments reflected a growing desire to distance contemporary culture from trends and styles that felt outworn, perhaps in a bid to articulate arguments for not only musical but also political progress. Along with this sense of rupture, though, there was a wish to protect the memories of the increasingly venerated struggles of the 1840s from easy appropriations by second-rank (or even first-rank) writers and composers.

Such concerns – concerns that rested on the perception of larger historical developments – underpinned critical responses to the staging of *La battaglia di Legnano* at La Scala in November 1861 (see Appendix 1 for some reviews). Mere months had passed since the end of hostilities in the South of the peninsula; now Italy, with the exception of Venice and Rome, had largely been ‘made’. Yet the events of 1859, let alone the revolutions of 1848, already seemed to lie far in the past. Milanese critics were unanimous in condemning *La battaglia* as a low-quality occasional piece, an opera that had become inadequate in the new political context, on account both of its incendiary subject and of its musical flaws.³⁵ ‘Verrà giorno in cui’, somebody claimed to have predicted in 1859,

³⁴ See the following claim: ‘La mania di mettersi in mostra con idee di alto patriottismo, sfoggiando declamazioni contro l’Austria, ed aspirazioni di poetico liberalismo, ha invaso siffattamente i cervelli, che nessuno scrittore od oratore oserebbe accozzare quattro parole sopra qualsivoglia argomento senza tirare in campo la politica [...] Noi proponiamo di introdurre nell’orchestra i cannoni – *rigati* se possibile – e di affidare i nuovi strumenti ad un reggimento di professori – zuavi. Si escludano le donne dal palcoscenico, almeno che non sieno eroine, armate di corazza e di lancia – i personaggi del melodramma sieno tutti cospiratori’: *Cosmorama pittorico*, 3 December 1859, 140. With regard to the ballet *Il genio d’Italia o Garibaldi a Caprera*, a critic opined: ‘l’argomento è tanto nella mente e nel cuore di tutti che non può che impiccolire e sembrare quasi inopportuno sul teatro. Nondimeno gli applausi non mancano, e vuolsi lode in generale ai compositori che si occupano di attualità e di cose patrie, benché sia astruso di toccare ai grandi nomi della storia, e impossibile in molti casi riescire all’altezza del soggetto’: *Il corriere delle dame*, 20 November 1860, 256. On Paolo Giorza’s opera *Corrado console di Milano*: ‘bisognava dirgli [al librettista, Luigi Gualtieri]: lascia in pace la Patria, ché non è tempo da strofette patriottiche in musica questo, e l’Arte che non ha che farci’: Valentino, in *Il pungolo*, 14 March 1860, 285. Complaints about ‘patriotic’ operas were also heard during the events of 1848; see the reaction of a critic to a staging of *Attila* in Ferrara in May 1848, in Parker, “*Arpa d’or*”, 95-6.

³⁵ By this time, *La battaglia* may well have been regarded as a product of 1848-49 politics, and thus unsuited to the more moderate political context that had come about during the late 1850s; however, this interpretation does not explain the opera’s positive reception in 1859.

ricomposte le cose d'Italia, e cessata la febbrile eccitazione del momento, la musica della *Battaglia di Legnano*, non mi esalterà forse tanto, come mi esalta di presente [...] Ora questo giorno è venuto; la febbrile agitazione del momento è cessata; le cose d'Italia se non sono del tutto ricomposte, non si trovano di certo a cattivo partito – 22 milioni di abitanti per intanto ci sono, uniti in una fede, in una speme, sotto uno scettro solo – il resto verrà dappoi.³⁶

[once the Italian situation is resolved and the feverish anxiety of the moment has faded away, the music of *La battaglia di Legnano* will no longer excite me as much as it does at present [...] Now this day has come; the feverish anxiety of the moment has faded away; the Italian situation is, if not entirely resolved, at least not in too bad conditions – we have 22 millions inhabitants, united in one faith, one hope, and under one sceptre – everything else will come later.]

Others argued that Verdi's work did not deserve to be 'sold' as a metaphor of Italy's Risorgimento achievements: it was no more than a minor opera, 'noisy' and 'bombastic', 'lacking true dignity', unable to 'foster love for the homeland by way of recalling the glorious deeds of the past'.³⁷ It was *La battaglia*'s non-masterpiece status that undermined its chances of surviving as a hallowed *lieu de mémoire* around which emergent interpretations of the Risorgimento, ones moulded retrospectively by feelings of past fulfilment as well as nostalgic loss, could crystallise.³⁸

The tone of the *La battaglia* reviews is in some ways similar to that underpinning a report from *La perseveranza* of the February 1860 staging of another Verdi opera at La Scala: *I Lombardi alla prima crociata*. According to several accounts, the fiasco of this production was due to the poor quality of the

³⁶ *La gazetta dei teatri*, 24 November 1861, 181.

³⁷ 'La battaglia di Legnano è chiassosa, sonora, magniloquente; ma non ha dignità vera': *La perseveranza*, 25 November 1861, 1; 'ad infiammare d'amor patrio col ricordo delle gloriose opere del passato': P[ietro] Cominazzi, in *La fama*, 26 November 1861, 190.

³⁸ The reference for *lieu de mémoire* is to Pierre Nora's seven-volume project *Les lieux de mémoire* (Paris, 1984-92); most of the essays are translated into English in *Rethinking France: Les Lieux de mémoire*, ed. Pierre Nora, trans. Mary Trouille, 4 vols. (Chicago, 2001-10), and *Realms Of Memory: The Construction of The French Past*, ed. Pierre Nora, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, 3 vols. (New York, 1996-8). For a discussion of Nora's concept and the literature it has spurred, see Chapter Two. Axel Körner has drawn attention to similar claims in the reception of *La battaglia di Legnano* in Bologna in 1860; see his *Politics of Culture*, 224-5. The review on which Körner draws states the following: 'Al grandioso titolo posto in fronte di questo Melodramma di nostro avviso, non bene rispondono né la musica, né la poesia. L'azione svolta dal Cammarano non manca di bei versi né di sensi generosi, ma essa è una povera tela di amori e di gelosie private, mancanti di carattere storico e che mal si rannodano colla grande Lega delle città lombarde e colla memorabile e gloriosa giornata, cui la musa ispirata e calda di patrio affetto di Giovanni Berchet cantò sì splendidamente nelle sue fantasie. Questa discordanza che passa fra il soggetto ed il dramma si riscontra pure nelle note di cui il Verdi rivestiva i versi del Cammarano. La musica della *Battaglia di Legnano* troppo si risente delle angustie del tempo in cui venne scritta': *Il monitore di Bologna*, 28 December 1860, 4.

musical performance (a type of deficiency to which many operatic failures were attributed during the 1860s, adding to the pervasive sense of Italy's musical 'crisis').³⁹ However, the journalist of *La perseveranza* goes further, advancing an explanation for the fiasco of *I Lombardi* that once again calls forth the sense of disproportion between Verdi's work (dating from and suited to the spirit of 1843) and the present political situation:

i Lombardi non esistono più, né esisterono mai; le memorie sono fallaci, anche le più innocue e recenti, quelle del 1841 [sic], quando il maestro Verdi esposeva musicalmente ai Milanesi, con imperituro monumento, le grandi memorie dei loro padri! Allora era un altro paio di maniche: l'Austria benignamente regnava, e i Lombardi sulla scena poteano fare la loro bella figura: oggidì che il sindacato dell'opinione può esser libero ed efficace, le tirannidi abbandonando il popolo felice che grida, come oggi, per le strade *viva il Re*, si condensarono tutte sulla povera musica malmenata.⁴⁰

[the Lombards no longer exist, nor have they ever existed; memories are deceptive, even the most innocuous and recent, those of 1841 [sic], when maestro Verdi exposed musically the great memories of their fathers to the citizens of Milan, as an imperishable monument! Back then, it was a different kettle of fish: Austria was ruling benevolently, and the Lombards on stage could cut a good figure: now that public opinion can speak freely and effectively, tyranny has abandoned the people, who happily shout in the streets *Long live the King!*, and has fallen instead on the poor music, which is beaten up.]

Just as, from the vantage point of 1861, *La battaglia di Legnano* was to be seen as a product of – and inextricably bound up with – the 1848-49 revolutions, so in the eyes of this critic *I Lombardi* lacked appeal to modern audiences for a similar type of anachronism.

In this regard it is worth noting that the Verdi operas that from the 1860s would become most persistently associated with Italians' patriotic feelings are precisely those works from the composer's early career that ceased to be performed, or aroused increasing disappointment, after Unification. Those operas that gradually fell out of the repertory in the leading Italian theatres and retained some circulation only in the smaller opera houses became absorbed into a different kind of canon, one grounded less in regular performance events than in the fetishism of increasingly distant – in musical style and stage presence – musical works. It is in this

³⁹ See *Gazzetta dei teatri*, 15 February 1860, 37, and *Il Malcontento*, in *Il trovatore*, 15 February 1860, 1.

⁴⁰ *La perseveranza*, 16 February 1860, 1.

void between ‘works’ and ‘events’, a void opened up by changing compositional and performance practices, that these early-Verdi *lieux de mémoire* thrived.⁴¹

One such operatic ‘memory site’, indeed the most paradigmatic one, is *Nabucco*. 1861 Milan again offers some stimulating insights. The opera was staged at La Scala – for the last time until 1913 – in February of that year. Premiered on 12th, it was repeated the following night. During the latter performance, at which Vittorio Emanuele himself was present, came the announcement of the fall of Gaeta.⁴² The fall marked the last step towards Unification; the Savoy monarch would soon be crowned the first King of Italy. Far from pausing over any possible metaphorical connection between the political circumstances and the plot of Verdi’s opera, critics voiced disappointment about the choice of the piece and its musical rendition. ‘The choice of *Nabucco*’, claimed the journalist of *La Lombardia*, ‘is not fitting. Why go back so stubbornly to these modern masterpieces, which we have heard so many times interpreted by the greatest artistic celebrities, and do so with insufficient means...?’⁴³ Another critic remarked that ‘only with an excellent, exceptional performance’ could one have given proper welcome to Verdi’s opera, which through widespread dissemination had become

⁴¹ *Nabucco* and *I Lombardi* provide a case in point. In Milan, both operas were staged several times at La Scala during the 1850s, their last nineteenth-century performances on this stage taking place in 1861 and 1864 respectively. From the 1860s to the end of the century, *Nabucco* was staged at the Teatro Carcano (1861-62, 1864, 1872 and 1876), the Teatro Castelli (1876) and the Teatro Dal Verme (1886); *I Lombardi* appeared at the Carcano (1860, 1861-62, 1865-66, 1871-72 and 1892), the Teatro Santa Radegonda (1876), the Teatro Fossati (1863 and 1894), the Circo Ciniselli (1867 and 1869) and the Dal Verme (1874, 1871 and 1873); see Raffaella Valsecchi and Bianca Maria Antolini, ‘Cronologia sintetica delle rappresentazioni d’opera nei teatri milanesi: 1861-1897’, in *Milano musicale: 1861-1897*, ed. Bianca Maria Antolini (Lucca and Milan, 1999), 43-59; and Beniamino Gutierrez, *Il Teatro Carcano (1803-1914): glorie artistiche e patriottiche, decadenza e resurrezione* (Milan, 1914). Of course, while many of Verdi’s early operas were falling out of the repertory, the last decades of the century saw an increasing number of revivals of ‘old’ compositions by other composers; see Chapter Two. For a discussion of and an attempt to unsettle the traditional historiographical binary work/event, see Chapter Four.

⁴² For evidence of *Nabucco* being staged on 13 February and Vittorio Emanuele attending this performance, see *La perseveranza*, 13 and 14 February 1861, 3 and 3, and *Gazzetta di Milano*, 14 February 1861, 167.

⁴³ ‘la scelta del *Nabucco* fu poco felice. Perché tornare ostinatamente a questi moderni capolavori, che udimmo tante volte interpretati dalle maggiori celebrità artistiche, e ritornarvi con mezzi insufficienti, quando ci sono tanti spartiti de’ nostri grandi maestri, o rare volte, o da lungo tempo non più dati, che giacciono coperti di polvere negli scaffali de’ negozianti di musica, e che Milano aggredirebbe come squisite novità?’, *La Lombardia*, 13 February 1861, 3.

‘note by note’ ingrained in Italians’ memory.⁴⁴ Such voices of discontent raise doubts about the extent of *Nabucco*’s ‘patriotic’ connotations as late as February 1861; but they were (again) articulated by perceptions of an irrecoverable incongruity between the past and the present ages, and they should also be read alongside competing claims.

Music critic Marco Marcelliano Marcello, composer-librettist and founder (in 1854) of the theatrical journal *Il trovatore*, was the author of a significant two-page article for *Il pungolo* in 1861, partly reproduced in Appendix 2. Marcello had already addressed *Nabucco* in an earlier piece published in an 1855 issue of the Turin *Rivista contemporanea*, recently brought to scholarly attention by Smart.⁴⁵ In both instances the critic discusses the opera *in tandem* with *I Lombardi* and *Ernani*. Marcello’s 1855 statements seem extremely advanced for the time in their formulation of political tropes concerning Verdi’s early operas. The critic’s 1861 article draws closely on this earlier piece, the most relevant passage of the later publication suggesting the following:

Due doti speciali caratterizzano il genio di Verdi nel *Nabucodonosor*, un’impronta che colpisce ed una concisione che fa maravigliare. S’aggiunga a queste due doti che direi materiali, l’altra tutta morale, di aver cioè tradotte le aspirazioni ed i bisogni del suo tempo: per cui a ragione fu da un critico francese chiamato il maestro della rivoluzione. Chi non ricorda quegli anni che precedettero il 1848, come il popolo italiano trovasse corrispondere al fremito che gli bolliva nell’anima i maschi concetti di Verdi, e come nei teatri si sollevasse a furori presaghi, quando udiva i famosi cori del *Nabucodonosor*, dei *Lombardi* e di *Ernani*? e poi se li ricantava esaltato di notte nelle vie, sintomi della risurrezione nazionale.⁴⁶

[Two special qualities characterise Verdi’s genius in *Nabucodonosor*: a striking effect and a surprising concision. To these two qualities, which I would call material, one must then add the completely moral one of having translated the aspirations and needs of his age: that is why he was justly called by a French critic the *maestro* of the revolution. Who will not remember the years that preceded 1848, and how the Italian people found the thrill boiling in their souls corresponding to the masculine concepts of Verdi’s music, and how they rose up taken by rapturous premonitions when they heard the famous choruses of *Nabucodonosor*,

⁴⁴ ‘Nessuno degli abituati al nostro grande teatro sapeva capacitarsi del perché si fosse posto mano adesso a questo spartito del Verdi, comunque esso sia riputato il migliore di quel bellissimo ingegno [...] Solo con una esecuzione ottima, straordinaria, sembrava non potersi far lieta accoglienza a questa musica che alle scene della Scala, alle minori della Canobbiana e del Carcano, su per gli organetti delle pubbliche vie, in privati concerti, nei canti dei *barabba*, e dappertutto abbiamo, direbbesi, nota per nota affidata alla memoria nostra’: Ariberto, in *Gazzetta del popolo di Lombardia*, 15 February 1861, 1.

⁴⁵ M[arco Marcelliano] Marcello, ‘Rassegna musicale: di Verdi, delle sue opere e specialmente della *Traviata*’, *Rivista contemporanea*, 3/4 (1855), 659-77; Smart discusses Marcello’s article in ‘How Political were Verdi’s Operas?’, 199-200.

⁴⁶ M[arco Marcelliano] Marcello, in *Il pungolo*, 14 February 1861, 2.

Lombardi and Ernani? And then they kept singing them, fiercely, in the streets overnight, as symptoms of national resurgence.]

There are two points I should like to raise here. The first concerns the role that particular figures, such as Marcello, might have played in the development of Verdi's political myth, and the coexistence of such voices with other, discordant points of view. How do we deal with this diversity: with the fact, for instance, that certain readings were proposed and bolstered by given individuals, but failed to be acknowledged and supported by others? The first challenge here lies in explaining *why* and also *how* – in material, practical terms – certain memories and interpretations of given historical experiences emerged and endured, while others did not manage to do so (a challenge that Alon Confino has called for in his study of the local/national relationship in late-nineteenth- to early-twentieth-century Germany).⁴⁷ A second, related venture would be to trace some of the influences among different authors, thus restoring efficacy as historical actors to voices that have thus far remained in the background. Marcello's reference to 'a French critic' who would have called Verdi 'the maestro of the revolution' offers a line of enquiry yet to be pursued: to my knowledge, this is the earliest known reference to the famous Verdi epithet, an epithet that would later reappear in an 1868 article by Francesco Flores D'Arcais and would be made widely popular by Gino Monaldi with his 1913 Verdi biography (with the title *Il maestro della rivoluzione italiana*).⁴⁸ Tracking the origins of the phrase and the identity of that French writer would help recover some of the channels of interaction between writers and audiences of different countries.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ See Alon Confino, *The Nation as a Local Metaphor: Württemberg, Imperial Germany, and National Memory, 1871-1918* (Chapel Hill and London, 1997), 4 and 11.

⁴⁸ See F[rancesco Flores] D'Arcais, 'Giuseppe Verdi e la musica italiana', *Nuova antologia di scienze, lettere ed arti*, 7/3 (1868), 566-75, here 570, and Gino Monaldi, *Il maestro della rivoluzione italiana* (Milan, 1913).

⁴⁹ The reciprocal influences and borrowings of different individuals (including Verdi) in their writings have often been underestimated, particularly from a transnational point of view. With regard to *Nabucco* and Verdi's famous declaration, in his so-called 'autobiographical sketch' from 1879, that the opera marked the beginning of his artistic career ('Con quest'opera si può dire veramente che ebbe principio la mia carriera artistica'), see this much earlier comment by an anonymous French writer: 'C'est par là [*Nabucco*] que Verdi a inauguré sa carrière; *Oberto di San Bonifacio* et *Un giorno di regno* n'ont été que des exercices de musicien stagiaire, les tâtonnements du noviciat': Anon., 'Giuseppe Verdi', in *Les grands et petits personages*, 5; Verdi's statement is quoted from Pougin, *Vita aneddotica*, 70. A similar statement was made by Felice Venosta in 1881:

My second point concerning Marcello's article takes me back to the issue of interweaving strands or *topoi* within the late-nineteenth-century discourse about 'Verdi risorgimentale'. The tripartite compilation of 'patriotic' music by Verdi sponsored by the critic – based as it is on the immediately popular 1840s choruses from *Nabucco*, *I Lombardi* and *Ernani* – was to become standard in later Verdi literature. Yet not only is this compilation here, in the 1855 and 1861 articles, in its earliest formulations; it also represents just one of several different patterns in the Italian and, I would suggest, larger European process of construction of Verdi's political image. In other countries, different Verdi operas were selected for their symbolic content, possibly as a result of continuing performing traditions of the composer's early works.⁵⁰ Furthermore, both Verdi's political activity during 1859-61 (particularly his election to Parliament) and his composition of the *Inno delle nazioni* for the London Exhibition of 1862 significantly popularised his political credentials outside Italy.⁵¹ The restricted geographical focus of this

'Il 9 marzo 1842 cominciò in Milano la vera vita artistica del Verdi': Venosta, 'L'esordio di Verdi a Milano: memorie inedite', *La Lombardia*, 25 March 1881, 2. Venosta's article was published in three instalments on 22, 23 and 25 March; given the date of publication and its many resonances with Verdi's 'autobiographical sketch', it constitutes an extremely interesting document. The article must have been published before the release of Pougin's *Vita aneddotica*, since the copy of the book kept at the Archivio Ricordi is stamped '6/1881' (my thanks to Maria Pia Ferraris for this information). Venosta, however, may have known Verdi's 'autobiographical sketch' before it came to press.

⁵⁰ 'On m'apporte au moment où j'écris ceci un numéro de la *Presse* (8 juillet 1859), où M. Paul de Saint-Victor a écrit ce que j'allais dire, et l'a écrit magnifiquement: «Le *Miserere* de Verdi a été, dans ces derniers temps, la grande lamentation de l'Italie... Les plaintes qu'il lui était interdit de faire éclater, elle les exprimait par ce chant tragique, que ses maîtres applaudissaient sans en comprendre le sens. – Voilà trente ans que l'Italie conspire en musique»: Marc Monnier, *L'Italie est-elle la terre des morts?* (Paris, 1860), 408. 'Verdi a écrit cet ouvrage [*Un ballo in maschera*] au moment où les passions politiques grondaient au cœur de l'Italie comme les feux souterrains de ces deux volcans [...] l'artiste aime d'un égal amour et son pays et son art, mais du triomphe des opprimés, de l'affranchissement de l'Italie': *La France musicale*, 27 January 1861, quoted from *La réception de Verdi en France*, 296. 'Non, ce n'est point l'auteur du *Trovatore* qu'on a envoyé siéger à la chambre des députés italiens; c'est Giuseppe Verdi, l'homme qui a partagé toutes les facultés aimantes de son cœur entre son art et sa patrie, cette noble terre, qu'il a vue pendant si longtemps, morcelée, asservie, agonisante, au point qu'en la regardant se tordre dans les souffrances, on avait cru qu'elle ne se relèverait plus, et on s'était hâté, trop hâté! de l'appeler la terre des morts. Seuls, les Italiens savent ce que l'artiste nourrissait de secrètes espérances, quand il écrivait *Attila* et qu'il ne craignait pas, au plus fort des persécutions d'une autorité soupçonneuse et sévissante, de jeter aux quatre vents cet hymne de liberté, ce cri de résurrection, exprimé par ces vers prophétiques: Cara Italia, già madre regina / Di possenti magnanimi figli; / Or macerie, deserto, rovina, etc.': Escudier, *Mes souvenirs*, 71.

⁵¹ 'Le célèbre compositeur G. Verdi, vient d'être, pour la seconde fois, élu député au parlement italien. C'est un nouvel hommage rendu à ce génie indépendant, à ce noble cœur

chapter and thesis precludes further investigation of these broader questions, which trespass into the growing research area of transnational history (although I will make a few remarks in the Conclusion). As a closing gesture for this chapter, then, I wish to go back to my opening material and briefly ponder on some of the broader implications of attempts to historicise the Verdi myth.

Epilogue

In his letter to Ricordi, the way Bima frames the anonymous poetical account of Verdi's and Italy's synergic mid-nineteenth-century developments is sustained by a clear sense of historical distance; something that, as we have seen, underpinned accounts of Verdi's political resonances from their very inception, when the composer's myth started to take clear shape around 1859. In addition to the sense of pastness, however, Bima's letter also enacts a thread of historical continuity: the author summons an almost inescapable teleological drive connecting the past with the present, and (optimistically) foreshadowing the future. 'Time has actualised the prophecy of the poet', Bima notes, referring to Verdi's uninterrupted prestige; in fact, he goes on to add, the composer 'went even beyond it, and he still demonstrates it to us today: I hope for many years, on occasions similar to this one, I will be able to shout, together with every good Italian citizen that loves the music of *his country*: *Viva Verdi!*'. It is as if the close-knit relationship between Verdi's

dont le monde entier applaudit les sublimes inspirations. Verdi n'est pas seulement un grand musicien, c'est une vaste intelligence qui a approfondi toutes les questions sociales, et qui est destiné, croyons-nous, à jouer un grand rôle dans les affaires d'Italie': *L'Art musical*, 14 February 1861, 86. 'En dehors des beaux-arts, le nom du maestro a joui d'une certaine popularité politique. Il appartenait depuis longtemps au parti du mouvement, et par une singularité remarquable, son nom, formé des cinq initiales de la fameuse devise *Victor Emmanuel Roi d'Italie* (VERDI), fut pendant plusieurs années le cri adopté dans les mouvements populaires de l'Italie du nord. M. Verdi a fait lui-même partie, en 1859, de l'assemblée nationale de Parme qui vota l'annexion à la Sardaigne': Vapereau, *Dictionnaire universel*, 1750. Following the premiere of the *Inno delle nazioni*: 'Verdi vit dans le cœur de ses compatriotes comme leur plus grand musicien, et comme un patriote ardent et d'un esprit élevé, qui a travaillé de toutes ses forces à la liberté de son pays': *Daily-News*, trans. in and quoted from *L'Art Musical*, 29 May 1862, 206. 'Le cri: *Viva Verdi*, a souvent retenti en Lombardie et même dans le Piémont à l'époque de la guerre contre l'Autriche. C'était un cri de ralliement. Le mot de l'énigme populaire, on le connaît aujourd'hui: les cinq lettres du nom de Verdi sont les initiales de ceux-ci: *Vittorio-Emmanuele* [sic] *Re d'Italia*. On enveloppait ainsi une profession de foi politique dans un anagramme. Du reste, le compositeur professe, dit-on, des opinions très libérales. Après avoir prêté son nom à des manifestations annexionnistes, il était naturel que M. Verdi allât siéger au parlement': Clément, *Les Musiciens célèbres*, 625-6.

and Italy's nineteenth-century accomplishments – the metonymical standing of the masculine drive and success of Verdi's music for those of the Italian Risorgimento – ensured a renewable presence to the past: a past constantly retrievable in its present outputs. At the same time, such a teleology allowed critics to foresee a future drifting along the same, interlocking direction of prosperity. The result of such a view of history is ultimately a fabric that keeps our (human beings') stories reassuringly together.

Perhaps this is one of the reasons why we are still wary of taking the leap, both in popular and at times scholarly contexts, from retellings of the Verdi myth.⁵² Disagreeing with the prevalent narrative, a narrative by now encrusted in, in fact long since operating *as* history, might seem to pull us apart from our predecessors: it would lay bare too crudely the voids lying ahead of (or behind) any change of direction – whether in revisions of knowledge or reshapings of identities. But here is where unearthing alternative stories, ones that perhaps speak more hushedly about Verdi's mid-nineteenth-century *risorgimentale* reputation, may be comforting today. It would yield a bond with long-gone human actors, and prompt us to engage further with notions of how political ideas occasionally become refracted through, negotiated with, and judged against operatic and musical events. Yet it would also force us to look deeper into the materiality of places, technologies and individual lives, helping to bring forth the myth less as a blanket concealing 'history "as it really was"', than as one of many different trails walked by nineteenth-century Italian (or even European) experiences.⁵³

Indeed, if there is one risk we may incur by striving too hard solely for acts of demythologisation – pausing too long on instances of lack of evidence, or

⁵² In spite of more or less general scholarly agreement, today, on the main claims made by the revisionist literature, such retellings continue to arise. In a paper presented at the 2013 Annual Meeting of the American Musicological Society, Douglas L. Ipson re-proposed the view of *Nabucco* as an opera that would have been understood as a patriotic statement in 1840s Italy. Ipson, however, relied almost exclusively on inferring conclusions (not supported by evidence of the opera's reception) from a body of contemporary Italian works that promoted the peninsula's independence and Unification through images and themes taken from the Hebrew Bible.

⁵³ Kristin M. Knittel, 'The Construction of Beethoven', in *The Cambridge History of Nineteenth-Century Music*, ed. Jim Samson (Cambridge, 2002), 118-50, 121. Laura Cruz and Willem Frijhoff also make a similar point about a recent turn in approaches to studying myths: the latter are increasingly treated as historical discourses in their own right; see Cruz and Frijhoff, 'Introduction: Myth in History, History in Myth', in *Myth in History, History in Myth*, ed. Laura Cruz and Willem Frijhoff (Leiden, 2009), 1-15.

deferring imaginative accounts of the various late-nineteenth-century declensions of Verdi's political image – it is that we lose sight of the positive potential the myth itself has to inform us of matters musical, political and ideological pertaining to a century that we so thoroughly investigate in our time. Ultimately, the challenge lies in acknowledging that the Verdi myth will keep changing shape as the perspective from which we are looking also shifts.⁵⁴ Lest we reify it, we may want to let it drive us into ever new interpretative directions. Retracing Verdi's place within the political culture of nineteenth-century Italy will then become an act of mutual redefinition of identities: one whereby historical actors pulled apart in both time and space may come closer to each other, reciprocally remodelling their appearance and the trajectories into which they cast their gazes.

⁵⁴ This is in line with post-Hayden-White definitions of history as pseudo-literary artefact: less a 'neutral' representation of the past than something imbued with the ideological content brought along by historical and constantly changing modes of narration.

APPENDIX 1

EXTRACTS FROM REVIEWS OF *LA BATTAGLIA DI LEGNANO*,
LA SCALA, MILAN, 23 NOVEMBER 1861

GAZZETTA DI MILANO, 24 NOVEMBER 1861, 1240.

...un lavoro che tradisce ad ogni passo la svogliatezza, la stanchezza, la fretta dell'autore [...] E tanto più scema la voglia di esaminare un'opera d'arte, quando non solo si ha in essa lo spettacolo di un forte ingegno che non si trova nel suo miglior momento, ma si ha anche il dolore che un tal momento lo abbia colto quando appunto aveva innanzi uno splendido tema e affatto degno della potenza del suo intelletto, nientemeno che l'impresa più grande, più gloriosa, più completa degli italiani.

GAZZETTA DEI TEATRI, 24 NOVEMBER 1861, 181.

...nel 1859, non appena le armate alleate Italo-Franche ebbero respinto al di là del Mincio i revisori dell'Austria, subito si pensò a far rappresentare anche fra noi codest'opera di Verdi, e fu nel teatro Carcano che le note della *Battaglia di Legnano* risuonarono [...] Fu una furia di applaudire. E di fatto chi non si sarebbe, *nel luglio* 1859, entusiastico udendo cantare:

Viva Italia! un sacro patto
Tutti stringe i figli tuoi!
Viva Italia! forte ed una
Colla spada e col pensier!

Chi non si sarebbe entusiastico, in quei tempi in cui ogni cuore batteva violentemente di patrio affetto, al giuro dei prodi guerrieri italiani, che facevano sacramento di porre fine ai danni d'Italia, cacciando oltralpe lo straniero? – nessuno io credo!

‘Verrà giorno in cui, dettava io in allora, ricomposte le cose d'Italia, e cessata la febbrile eccitazione del momento, la musica della *Battaglia di Legnano*, non mi esalterà forse tanto, come mi esalta di presente; ciò non pertanto io sono d'opinione che in luogo di essere una delle musiche scadenti del Verdi, come alcuni pretendono, è una buona musica, degna sorella dei più applauditi spartiti del celebre autore.’

Ora questo giorno è venuto; la febbrile agitazione del momento è cessata; le cose d'Italia se non sono del tutto ricomposte, non si trovano di certo a cattivo partito – 22 milioni di abitanti per intanto ci sono, uniti in una fede, in una speme, sotto uno scettro solo – il resto verrà dappoi.

Dunque diceva che è venuto il giorno in cui la musica della *Battaglia di Legnano* non mi avrebbe esaltato, come mi esaltò due anni sono; fui profeta! però devo darne gran parte di colpa ad una esecuzione non per anco matura.

LA PERSEVERANZA, 25 NOVEMBER 1861, 1.

Nei comuni dettami della critica musicale è ormai accettata la massima che la musica del Verdi ha un valore eccezionale, e trae il suo gran prestigio, non solo dalle sue qualità essenzialmente artistiche della fantasia e della forma, ma da un certo senso latente di inquietudine, di vigoria, di ardore prepotente ch'era, a' suoi tempi, in stupenda armonia collo spirito irrequieto del nostro paese anelante a nuovi e più fortunati destini. – Questo sentimento serpeggiante nelle animate ispirazioni dell'autore del *Rigoletto* ora lo diremo politico, come una volta era vezzo chiamarlo rivoluzionario. – Parrebbe che, data questa tendenza istintiva e spontanea, ne dovesse conseguire un risultato completo ed efficace, quando il compositore stesso fosse chiamato a vestire musicalmente un soggetto patriottico, di circostanza, nel quale gli fosse libero di aprire la vena all'espressione dei sentimenti politici. – Eppure così non è; o almeno, quando Verdi nel quarantanove ebbe il destro a Roma di musicare questa *Battaglia di Legnano*, così calorosa, così piena di osanna all'Italia, di imprecazioni allo straniero, di aspirazioni le più sante, le più nobili, le più generose, non sappiamo se per fretta o per naturale impotenza, l'ingegno suo non fece, come seppe fare altre volte, un lavoro musicalmente e drammaticamente perfetto ed ispirato [...] *La battaglia di Legnano* è chiassosa, sonora, magniloquente; ma non ha dignità vera, sentimento profondo, è mancante di forme gentili e squisite, e anche quando s'atteggia all'espressione eroica e patriottica, ha qualche cosa di vacuo, superficiale, che non infonde nell'animo di chi ascolta i sensi che vuole esprimere.

DOTTOR VERITÀ [LEONE FORTIS], IN *IL PUNGOLO*, 25 NOVEMBER 1861, 2-3.

Le due rivoluzioni italiane passarono senza un canto che le riassumesse – e se la rivoluzione di Francia ebbe la *Marsigliese*, è da notare ch'essa non isgorgò dalla fantasia di un'artista, ma balzò dal cuore agitato d'un proscritto.

Gli è che l'arte ha bisogno dell'avvenire, o del passato, per ispirarsi alle speranze o alle memorie che sono le sue vere e legittime Muse – il presente l'affanna sempre e la soffoca.

Strana cosa! sentite più il fremito, il rombo della rivoluzione italiana nel *Nabucco* e nei *Lombardi* scritti quando la rivoluzione era latente, rinchiusa negli animi, costretta nelle aspirazioni – la sentite, dicevamo, assai più che in questa *Battaglia di Legnano*, scritta a Roma nel 49, quando la rivoluzione era al suo colmo, e dalle aspirazioni tradotta in fatti, dagli animi passata nel dominio della realtà.

Dal 49 in poi, in questo decennio di lotta e di protesta nazionale, Verdi fece con la musica della politica – come noi tutti l'abbiam fatta con la letteratura e l'umorismo; fece della politica con la musica, perché forse senza renderne conto a se stesso, trasse dalle irrequietezze, dai tumulti dell'anima sua una musica che rispondeva perfettamente alle irrequietezze, ai tumulti, agli spasimi delle anime nostre – ma quando questi tumulti, questi spasimi ebbero la loro esplosione, non cercò più questa volta un soggetto di *attualità* per rendere estrinsecati nelle azioni quei sentimenti che aveva indovinati sì meravigliosamente quando erano rinchiusi nell'anima del suo pubblico: – e nol cercò, né il cercherebbe forse più, appunto perché la sua *Battaglia di Legnano* lo convinse che non si può fare ad un tempo dell'arte e dell'attualità.

A[NTONIO] GHISLANZONI, IN *LA LOMBARDIA*, 25 NOVEMBER 1861, 1.

Ispirato dalla rivoluzione, il maestro Verdi improvvisava nel 1848 un'opera dal tema bellicoso e patriottico, che interpretata la prima volta a Roma, poscia a Firenze dalla Barbieri, dal Fraschini e dal Ferlotti, traeva ad entusiasmo le masse. Quest'opera riunendo i pregi e i difetti di un lavoro di circostanza e, direi quasi, estemporaneo, col decorrere dei tempi, col succedersi degli avvenimenti e colle modificazioni introdotte dallo stesso Verdi nello stile drammatico musicale, dovea più tardi perdere il primitivo valore.

PIETRO COMINAZZI, IN *LA FAMA*, 26 NOVEMBER 1861, 190.

...l'illustre autore della musica farebbe opera generosa e patriottica ritessendo le note a tutte quelle parti, e son molte purtroppo, che non parvero degne di lui. Noi avremmo così da chi può tanto un'opera splendida e generosa, quale richiedono i tempi, atta ad infiammare d'amor patrio col ricordo delle gloriose opere del passato. Con questa speranza noi dimentichiam volentieri la noja e il disgusto che provar ci fece ben di spesso questa che chiamare vogliamo prima imperfetta edizione della *Battaglia di Legnano*, ed aspettiam la seconda e compiuta.

APPENDIX 2

EXTRACTS FROM ARTICLES AND BOOKS IN ITALIAN WITH
POLITICAL TROPES ABOUT VERDI (1855–81)⁵⁵

M[ARCO MARCELLIANO] MARCELLO, 'RASSEGNA MUSICALE. DI VERDI, DELLE SUE OPERE E SPECIALMENTE DELLA *TRAVIATA*', *RIVISTA CONTEMPORANEA* 3/4 (1855), 659-77, 666-8.

A coloro che accusano Verdi di aver fatto spreco nella sua prima maniera di troppa robustezza, di soverchia sonorità, di un uso smodato di suoni acuti nelle voce umane per esprimere passioni esagerate e del frastuono de' strumenti metallici nell'orchestra a colorire con maggior energia le sue scene; di aver abusato di *unisoni*, di ritmi troppo martellati, di melodie soverchiamente popolari, noi risponderemo com'egli non facesse altro che tradurre nella sua musica le condizioni nazionali d'allora: quando cominciavano a fermentare le passioni politiche negli animi bollenti che si preparavano alle grandi lotte che più tardi scoppiarono come un vulcano.

Tutti fummo testimoni, a cagion d'esempio, dell'entusiasmo che destarono nelle moltitudini i grandiosi *cori* del *Nabucco*, dei *Lombardi* e d'*Ernani*; e l'invenzione di quella forma popolare e compiuta si debbe al solo Verdi. Quei *cori* erano allora la verace espressione dei desideri universali: il loro *ritmo* energico e sicuro traduceva le speranze vicine, e il loro *unisono* conveniva giustamente a ritrarre l'unanimità di propositi che covava negli animi di tutti.

Io rammento tuttavia con qual avidità mirabile tutte le plebi delle nostre città italiane si impadronirono di quelle larghe e chiare melodie, e con qual accordo le andassero vociando di notte tempo, lungo le squallide vie, confortandosi della grave realtà del presente coll'aspirazione verso l'avvenire [...] Perciò que' *cori* di Verdi in poco tempo divennero voce delle moltitudini. Aggiungi all'incantesimo della musica il senso delle parole, nelle quali traspariva, o si credeva, o si voleva trovare allusioni alla condizione in cui versava allora l'Italia, e troverai la ragione di tale fanatismo.

Nel *Nabucco* infatti erano gli esuli ebrei che schiavi in Egitto rimpiangevano la loro patria *sì bella e perduta*; nei *Lombardi* erano i crociati che sovra suolo straniero tornavano colla mente al paese nativo e nel loro accasciamento pregavano:

Deh! non far che ludibrio alle genti

Sieno, Cristo, i tuoi fidi guerrier;

nell'*Ernani* erano gli Spagnuoli che tramavano contro la vita d'un tiranno e giuravano d'essere fratelli,

Siamo tutti una sola famiglia.

Figuratevi come il nostro popolo rinveniva il suo pascolo in questa musica ed in questa poesia, fino allo scoppio della rivoluzione.

A dar maggior peso a questa verità che la musica risponde sempre ai bisogni del popolo, basterà questa mia osservazione, che io mi sappia, da nessuno finora

⁵⁵ I have omitted all biographies and biographical sketches of Verdi.

notata. Appena compressa la rivoluzione italiana, in quello stordimento che segue uno sforzo fallito, la musica pure doveva rivelare questo mutamento morale. E appunto nel 1849 Verdi d'un tratto cambiò maniera: lasciando da parte l'antica sonorità, il fragore, l'esagerazione (se si vuole), per dare luogo ad un fare meno rumoroso e più tranquillo in vista, ma certo più pensato e più profondo: è la stessa voce che prima animava e scuoteva, e quindi piange e si lamenta.

Più non gli convengono gli argomenti grandiosi, popolari, eroici, come *Nabucco*, *I Lombardi*, *Attila*, *Giovanna d'Arco* e *La Battaglia di Legnano* (nata nel fervor della lotta): per mutar tenore al suo stile ei cercherà temi più acconci; ed ecco come nacque *Luisa Miller*; dalla quale ha cominciamento, a detta di tutti, la seconda sua maniera, che ei venne sempre più perfezionando sino alla *Traviata*, l'ultima delle sue opere che ei dettò in Italia.

COURRIER DU DIMANCHE, TRANSLATED IN AND QUOTED FROM *IL TROVATORE*, 20 JULY 1859, 2.

Verdi è considerato, al di là delle Alpi, come una delle personificazioni le più generose della moderna Italia. I suoi accenti infiammano il suo paese, l'Italia, attraverso le armonie di questa traduzione poetica e drammatica, pare riconosca i suoi propri sentimenti, le sue proprie speranze, i suoi propri sogni... Come la sua nobile e bella patria, Verdi ha sofferto e pianto in silenzio, egli ha soffocato nel fondo della sua anima i suoi risentimenti, le sue rabbie. Ma così, come sotto la menzogna dei drammi, sempre scelti nella storia con un pensiero patriottico, egli ha saputo trovare di queste melodie commoventi, palpitanti, per cantare lo svegliarsi dell'indipendenza e della libertà! La impronta di queste ispirazioni, sotto le quali gli amici d'Italia nel dolore riconoscono i battiti del suo cuore, i fremiti de' dolori e delle aspirazioni comuni alla liberazione del giogo dei tedeschi, la si trova, la si riconosce nel finale dell'*Ernani*, nell'aria del *Trovatore*, nel finale de' *Lombardi*, nell'aria e nel duetto del *Rigoletto*, nel finale e nei cori del *Macbeth*, nel finale de' *Vespri Siciliani*, ecc. ecc.

MARCO MONNIER, *L'ITALIA È LA TERRA DEI MORTI?* (NAPLES, 1860), 341-2 AND 463-4.

Alcuni anni fa, io era ancora ragazzo e viaggiava per veder quadri, palazzi, immagini, l'Italia de' viaggiatori e non quella degl'Italiani. Ma una guida, che mi seguiva da per tutto, ch'io disprezzava molto, e che pur valeva meglio di me, non mi parlava d'altro che del gran cittadino di Venezia [Daniele Manin]. Mi ricorda che una sera, al teatro della Fenice, si dava un'opera di Verdi. Quando si cantarono questi versi:

La patria tradita – a sorger t'invita,

Fratelli corriamo – la patria a salvar!

un fremito corse per la platea, e la mia guida, che aveva nome Daniele, come Manin, mi disse tosto: «Nel 1847, la sera di Santo Stefano, si dava in questo teatro la stessa opera, e tutti si alzarono a questo punto, battendo i piedi e le mani. Un capitano austriaco era là, in quel palco, e pareva che beffasse la gente: Manin era qui, nel sito ove siamo, e in piedi, con le braccia conserte, cogli occhi rivolti al palco, guardò fisso l'Austriaco, e gli fece chinare il capo» [...] Mi si porta, mentre scrivo questo, un numero della *Presse* (8 luglio 1859), in cui il signor Paolo di

Saint-Victor scrisse quello ch'io stava per dire, e lo scrisse stupendamente: «Il *Miserere* di Verdi fu, in questi ultimi tempi, la gran lamentazione dell'Italia... I gemiti, che le era vietato di far iscoppiare, erano da lei significati con quel canto tragico, che i suoi padroni applaudevano senza comprenderne il senso. Sono trent'anni che l'Italia cospira in musica».

[Originally published in French in Marc Monnier, *L'Italie est-elle la terre des morts?* (Paris, 1860).]

M[ARCO MARCELLIANO] MARCELLO, 'RASSEGNA TEATRALE. R. TEATRO ALLA SCALA. *NABUCODONOR*. OPERA DI G. VERDI', *IL PUNGOLO*, 14 FEBRUARY 1861, 1-2.

Nel 1842, a questo istesso teatro, un giovane maestro di Busseto, quasi sconosciuto, si presentava con questo spartito; il quale non fu accettato dall'avveduto impresario d'allora, se non perché un mecenate milanese (che non era un nobile) si rese mallevadore dell'esito di esso, obbligandosi in caso di sconfitta di pagare una somma convenuta.

Questo giovane aveva, due anni prima, in una stagione minore, esposto qui il suo primo lavoro, *Oberto di S. Bonifacio*, che venne accolto con sufficiente indulgenza; quantunque pochi abbiano intraveduto in quel suo saggio giovanile l'aurora di un genio. Sventura volle che un suo secondo tentativo, *Un giorno di regno*, non durasse che appena una sera, e venisse altamente disapprovato, laonde il giovane maestro fu da quell'avveduto impresario d'allora condannato all'ostracismo. E le porte della Scala non si sarebbero più aperte innanzi a lui, senza la protezione del milanese mecenate.

Il *Nabucodonosor* fu rappresentato. La moltitudine lo ammirò come un prodigio fino dalla prima sera. Giuseppe Verdi, vivendo ancora Rossini, Donizetti, Mercadante, Pacini, Coccia e Ricci, fu per voto universale proclamato re del teatro musicale: e gli l'attestarono, con plebiscito irrefragabile, gli entusiasmi con cui questa sua grande opera fu salutata in breve da tutta Italia [...] Due doti speciali caratterizzano il genio di Verdi nel *Nabucodonosor*, un'impronta che colpisce ed una concisione che fa maravigliare. S'aggiunga a queste due doti che direi materiali, l'altra tutta morale, di aver cioè tradotte le aspirazioni ed i bisogni del suo tempo: per cui a ragione fu da un critico francese chiamato il maestro della rivoluzione. Chi non ricorda quegli anni che precedettero il 1848, come il popolo italiano trovasse corrispondere al fremito che gli bolliva nell'anima i maschi concetti di Verdi, e come nei teatri si sollevasse a furori presaghi, quando udiva i famosi cori del *Nabucodonosor*, dei *Lombardi* e di *Ernani*? e poi se li ricantava esaltato di notte nelle vie, sintomi della risurrezione nazionale.

FILIPPO FILIPPI, 'UN BALLO IN MASCHERA: MELODRAMMA IN TRE ATTI, MUSICA DI GIUSEPPE VERDI', *GAZZETTA MUSICALE DI MILANO*, 20 MARCH, 10 AND 24 APRIL, 1 AND 8 MAY 1859; REPRINTED IN A SLIGHTLY EXTENDED VERSION IN *RIVISTA CONTEMPORANEA*, 9/24 (1861), 275-94, 278.

È innegabile che la grande commozione politica in cui s'agitò inquieto il nostro paese, ha contribuito grandemente all'espansione di tutti i caratteri che costituiscono l'ingegno e quasi il temperamento dell'illustre maestro. – L'Italia poteva abbandonarsi ai felici godimenti, alle impressioni del sentimento appassionato, al sensualismo della bellezza melodica con cui l'avevano beatificata e commossa i

grandi compositori che illustrarono la prima metà del nostro secolo, quando nella musica lirica non si ricercavano che i sensi palesi dell'amore e l'abbondanza dei canti. – Ma, come ha notato giustamente il *Laprade*, l'influenza della musica è oggidì accresciuta da nuovi elementi, ha trovato negli animi dei contemporanei qualche cosa che differisce dall'usuale ascendente delle sue seducenti attrattive: essa ha trovato aspirazioni latenti e compresse, certe condizioni dell'intelligenza e del sentimento comune meglio adatte all'espressione di un linguaggio indeterminato come il suo, che alla forma limitata, precisa ed esatta della parola. Per servire a questa necessità occorreva un complesso di qualità intellettive e morali difficili a rinvenirsi in un solo individuo; né altrimenti si potrebbero spiegare gli sforzi infruttuosi dei tanti compositori che ad onta di molto ingegno musicale fallirono, e la preminenza dispotica esercitata dal Verdi sul pubblico del suo paese. Egli solo difatti, ponendosi coll'arte all'altezza delle nostre irrequietudini, ha saputo imprimere alla sua musica un'espressione indeterminatamente completa, la fece un'eco vigoroso [*sic*] di forti agitazioni; il concitamento che ai freddi analizzatori del bello appare eccessivo, cogli straordinari pregi dei suoi difetti rimarrà nella storia dell'arte non solo come testimonianza delle illimitate prerogative della musica, ma come un brillante riflesso della presente civiltà, un eloquente commentario tutto ideale della nostra storia.

FRANCESCO SELMI, 'DI ALCUNE RAGIONI DELLA PRESENTE MEDIOCRITÀ IN ITALIA', *RIVISTA CONTEMPORANEA*, 10/28 (1862), 383-428, 420-4.

Mentre le lettere e le arti decaddero a profondo in Italia, fu strano come facesse quasi eccezione la musica [...] Fatto sta che continuammo nell'eccellenza delle composizioni e delle esecuzioni musicali con alacrità e felicità invidiate fino ai giorni nostri; fornendo i teatri italiani e stranieri di cantanti valentissimi, di opere e di balli, quelle stupende per magistero di note, e magnifici gli altri per invenzione ed intreccio di mimica e di danze. Gli stranieri ne dedussero essere noi un popolo insuperabile per le sinfonie, le cabalette ed i trilli, ma nulla restarci di più sostanzievole delle glorie avite. A Rossini, come è noto, succedero maestri degnissimi di bella fama, Donizetti, Bellini, Mercadante, Pacini, Verdi, e potrebbesi recitare più lunga sequenza di nomi famosi. Rossini gaudente, Donizetti bizzarro, Bellini inclinato a malinconia, Verdi di umore bilioso, passarono gli anni scrivendo spartiti immortali e significando ciascuno, secondo l'indole italiana, quel colorito che il sentimento nazionale andò assumendo col succedersi degli avvenimenti, facendolo nondimeno piuttosto inconsci che ad iscopo premeditato, e condottivi da quegli arcani influssi che la condizione generale degli animi opera su di ciascunovi [*sic*], innestando spiriti i quali si attemperino al pensiero predominante [...] Ingeneratasi la consuetudine di non impacciarsi di faccende attinenti al governo, questa naturalmente si conservò in tradizione o costume come suol essere di molte cose; onde non reca stupore se Verdi, il quale trasse lampi nuovi dalla fantasia da illuminarne le opere sue, non acconsentisse al desiderio di molti, di musicare l'inno d'Italia. Meno ancora farà meraviglia che Rossini dalle sue delizie parigine non sentisse erompere in animo un canto al suo paese redento; né Mercadante, né Petrella, né Villanis, né Peri, né gli altri si ponessero al cembalo chiedendogli ispirazione a celebrare la gloria nazionale. Un inno, un magnifico inno di Rossini o di Verdi, nato in impeto di amore, di compiacenza, di trionfo per il loco nativo fatto libero e grande, sarebbesi divulgato come l'elettrico da un capo all'altro della

penisola, avrebbe svegliato i cuori a palpitare, infiammati gli spiriti, eccitati i soldati a combattere, cresciuto loro lo slancio, se pure ciò era possibile, nel caldo, nelle furie della mischia. Non vollero questa foglia di più alla corona d'alloro di cui la musa li circondò alla fronte; quantunque tal foglia avrebbe valso cento corone, eterna ai posteri, invidia dei contemporanei [...] Comunque sia, le marce guerresche, i cori concitati, i lamenti di un canto flebile, passionato, la pietà di una preghiera rivolta a Dio soccorritore dei miseri, fu senza fallo come pioggia al cuore quasi inaridito dei nostri dissipati. Una fuga di note, un bell'accordo armonico, non dovette dare ali al pensiero, fosse pure per un breve intervallo, e fecondarlo d'idee luminose e gentili? Io rammento che il canto nei *Puritani* in cui si grida a libertà, Orombello nella *Beatrice* che narra i tormenti della tortura inflittagli dal tiranno, l'inno di guerra della *Norma*, il coro dei Lombardi assetati ed esuli dal suolo nativo, e Rigoletto che scherza dinanzi ai cortigiani collo strazio dentro per la figliuola rubatagli dalla prepotenza ducale, ed altri tratti eccitarono sì gli ascoltatori che questi seppero cavarne o reminiscenza o analogia colle sventure italiane; laonde quei pezzi divennero prediletti al popolo, e replicati su mille toni a sfogo dell'animo, a segno dei desideri. La polizia se ne avvidero, ne ingelosirono, e determinarono o che il passo malaugurato fosse tolto, o si mutassero le strofe *sovversive*. Col quale provvedimento ne aumentarono l'importanza, aguzzarono gli appetiti, impuntigliarono gli spiriti.

LA PERSEVERANZA, 31 JANUARY 1863, 1.

...la musica di Verdi esercita la sua irresistibile influenza, influenza che un giorno comprendeva comuni speranze, le quali pur troppo non sono ancora allo stato di assolute e complete memorie.

G. B., IN *CORRIERE MERCANTILE*, 19 APRIL 1864, 1.

Quest'opera [*I Lombardi alla prima crociata*] fu composta pochi anni prima del quarantasette, quando già in Italia correva quasi un misterioso presentimento della grande rivoluzione che dovea prorompere nel quarantotto. La impazienza di chi freme ed aspetta, si rivela tutta in quest'opera di Verdi piena di vita, di brio, di esuberanza giovanile, e del fragor delle imminenti battaglie. È un'opera del genere Verdi puro sangue.

A. G. [ANTONIO GHISLANZONI], IN *GAZZETTA MUSICALE DI MILANO*, 28 JULY 1867, 238.

Ci si narra un commovente episodio che precedette di poche ore la morte del povero Barezzi. Sfinito dalla malattia, quel povero vecchio era caduto in letargo – si tremò per alcuni istanti che quello non fosse l'eterno sopore della morte. Lacrimoso e tremante, ma non ancora disperato di poter rianimare quelle amate sembianze, Verdi si avvicina al pianoforte e si fa ad eseguire sovr'esso il famoso coro del *Nabucco*: *Va pensiero sull'ali dorate*, quella melodia ispirata, che ricordava a tutti e due, al maestro ed al vecchio moribondo, le grandi commozioni, i sublimi tripudii di un primo trionfo. – A quel suono, il Barezzi si destò, si levò sui guanciali come rapito da estasi, i suoi occhi sfavillarono di contento... – «È il mio Verdi!... è il coro del *Nabucco*!» Esclamò con l'accento della gioia. – E fu l'ultima gioia del povero vecchio.

A[NTONIO] GHISLANZONI, 'ANGELO MARIANI', *GAZZETTA MUSICALE DI MILANO*, 4 AUGUST 1867, 243-4.

Nel 1846, la musica di Verdi presagiva la rivoluzione del 1848 – era musica febbrile, convulsa, esuberante, ma in quella musica c'era tutta l'agitazione di un popolo, c'era tutta una Italia impaziente di giogo straniero e anelante alla pugna. I critici slombati e pedanti, i quali nelle opere dell'artista non veggono che la forma, ed altra perfezione non riconoscono se non quella che è il prodotto del calcolo, della pazienza, della imitazione, sono nel loro pieno diritto di inneggiare enfaticamente alle ultime produzioni del Verdi, al solo scopo di riprovare le prime, e di gettarle, tutte in fascio, alle fiamme. – No! noi non saremo così ingrati verso l'illustre maestro da obliare le grandi e nobili scosse ch'egli ha prodotto in noi colle sue prime musiche; non ci accuseremo di cretinismo per avere, nella nostra giovinezza, preso parte a questo delirio di tutta Italia, pel quale, alle prime rappresentazioni del *Nabucco*, dei *Lombardi*, dell'*Ernani*, gli spettatori balzavano dalle seggiole ed acclamavano al maestro come le turbe acclamavano ai profeti. Non è esagerazione ciò che scriviamo. La prima musica di Verdi ha suscitato entusiasmi quali la storia del teatro non ricorda più solenni e più universali.

A[NTONIO] GHISLANZONI, 'LA CASA DI VERDI A SANT'AGATA', *GAZZETTA MUSICALE DI MILANO*, 26 JULY 1868, 242-6, 245.

E presso quel pianoforte ho inteso narrare, intorno alle prime composizioni teatrali dell'illustre maestro, degli aneddoti piccanti, i quali contraddicono alle comuni dicerie. Vi è ben poco di vero in ciò che si ripete generalmente sulle circostanze che precedettero e accompagnarono la rappresentazione del *Nabucco*...

FRANCESCO D'ARCAIS, 'GIUSEPPE VERDI E LA MUSICA ITALIANA', *NUOVA ANTOLOGIA DI SCIENZE, LETTERE ED ARTI*, 7/3 (1868), 566-75, 570.

Al *Nabucco* tennero dietro i *Lombardi* che furono un nuovo passo nella via della riforma. L'originalità delle idee è per avventura minore che non nell'opera precedente, ma l'indipendenza delle *forme* continua ad essere notevole. L'*Ave Maria*, il celebre terzetto del *battesimo* ed altre pagine di questo spartito sono altrettante proteste contro le antiche tradizioni del teatro italiano. La libertà della musica pare quasi annunciare le prossime libertà politiche.

E, per verità, l'ingegno del Verdi fu tratto a questo divorzio col passato dalla forza dei tempi. La nuova generazione chiedeva alla musica che adempisse un ufficio più alto e più nobile che non sia quello di dilettere soltanto. Si voleva da lei che parlasse non già ai sensi, ma alla mente ed al cuore, che fosse fedele immagine degli affetti, delle passioni, delle aspirazioni popolari. A quest'arduo compito non venne meno il Verdi; egli fu veramente il maestro della rivoluzione italiana. La violenza febbrile che agita le sue prime opere si trovava allora d'accordo collo stato degli animi; i ritmi energici, lo strumentale vigoroso, quel non so che di aspro e di selvaggio che ora biasimiamo, erano allora i mezzi necessari per scuotere la fibra di un popolo da secoli sonnacchiante.

F. S., IN *GAZZETTA PIEMONTESE*, 22 JANUARY 1872, 1.

Quella musica, quei ritmi, quegli atteggiamenti, quel colore, mi destarono [in passato] sentimenti che non so esprimere in altro modo che dicendoli *comunal*i:

intendiamoci, in senso derivativo da *Comuni*, non *comune* semplicemente, o dalla Comune parigina. Fui tratto col pensiero al medio-evo, a Barbarossa, alla Lega lombarda, a quei popolani, a quei signori d'allora, non meno grossolani dei loro *uomini* e, per associazione d'idee, da costoro passai alle facce di quei fiorentini che Masaccio e Filippo Lippi figurarono per Apostoli ed altro nella famosa cappella dei Brancacci ed altrove (Dio, che viaggio!). V'ha a cui non garbano quegli atteggiamenti, quegli impeti e quegli scatti, quelle rabbie che dimostrò quivi e altrove il Verdi. Ma si mettano in lui, si riportino al 1842, ma pensino a quel che n'è derivato e a cui produrre contribuirono anco un poco le note del Verdi. E se un giorno si gridò *Viva Verdi*, con certe intenzioni non puramente artistiche, ciò non fu soltanto per la ragione che le sigle componenti quel nome suonassero per appunto: Vittorio Emanuele Re d'Italia. Verdi non è per certo più il maestro del *Nabucco*: ed è una curiosa combinazione che qui si senta quella che si può dir la sua prima opera, nel medesimo tempo che in Milano si stan facendo le prove della sua ultima. Ma assistendo, come faremmo qui, al *Nabucco*, non si può a meno ed è giocoforza riportarci a quei tempi e al Verdi d'allora. Sicuramente che per ciò, e per ciò appunto, il *Nabucco*, come altresì i *Lombardi*, è una musica che ha fatto il suo tempo. Tal pure si è per motivi analoghi, dell'*Ernani*, dei *Foscari*, ecc., troppo incorporati, direi col Desanctis [*sic*] «nella società del tempo in cui nacquero in ciò ch'ella ha di più reale e particolare». E a quel modo che per certi e molti rispetti, il Verdi puossi dir l'Alfieri della musica, egli è pure il l'Hayez, il Grossi, l'Azeglio... «che dia bando allo stranier» come dice, nella sua aria, Zaccaria [...] E – *Va pensiero sull'ali dorate* – come pure l'altro famoso dei *Lombardi* non sono musica della natura della *Preghiera del Mosè*, e quasi altrettanto bella e popolare?

F. UDA, IN *LA LOMBARDIA*, 14 JULY 1874, 1.

La prima sera che al teatro Dal Verme si diede i *Lombardi* di Verdi – quest'opera che or sono trenta anni aveva fatto battere tanti cuori e creato a metà colla Rivoluzione le famose Cinque Giornate – quest'opera petroliera dei suoi tempi, che faceva gridare *Viva Verdi*, facendo impallidire l'Austria che nel cognome dell'illustre maestro ravvisava le temute iniziali del *Re d'Italia* – quella sera, dico, il pubblico che v'assisteva era così scarso, così microscopico, così debole per le sue traspirazioni forzate, che non sentì neppure il coraggio di protestare contro una specie di profanazione, che sul palcoscenico si faceva della musica rivoluzionaria delle Cinque Giornate [...] Veramente non ci fu che un mezzo risveglio al coro dei congiurati e a quell'altro dei crociati che, arrivati felicemente in Gerusalemme, cantano *O Signore dal tetto natio*; pezzi che possono destare ancora grandi e sublimi emozioni, e che diffatti si vollero udire per due volte...

LUIGIA CODEMO, *PAGINE FAMIGLIARI, ARTISTICHE, CITTADINE (1750-1850)* (VENICE, 1875), 315-16 AND 400.

Tale era l'Italia negli anni, che precedettero il 48. Essendo stato mio padre dall'Ateneo di Treviso nominato a rappresentarlo al congresso di Napoli, noi partimmo nell'agosto del 1845, e ci avviammo alla bella Partenope. Non si può descrivere quale aspetto di profonda pace, di serenità incomparabile avesse in quel tempo nella sua abituale magnificenza la vita italiana; ossia la vita morale, sociale, artistica: la prosperità dei campi, la quiete degli animi; invano la penna tenta

interpretare lo splendore di tanta pace, in questi ricordi... Bensì vedo cogli occhi dello spirito in quell'estate i paeselli per cui si transitava e mi rimane l'impressione che ogni giorno fosse festa. Su pei muri scritto: Viva VERDI: per le strade, nei lieti convegni sento a cantare il coro dei *Lombardi*: nei dopo pranzo le bande percorrere allegramente le vie, in mezzo allo spensierato buon umore di popoli, a cui parevano ignote le passioni, che più tardi li portarono a così seri destini [...] Il nome del vapore indicava per sé stesso un pensiero occulto: ossia il nome della provincia serva, che si dovea redimere. Le pareti delle stanze, sotto coperta, rappresentavano le principali scene del romanzo i *Promessi Sposi*, e la banda militare, sonando i sublimi cori di Verdi, ben diceva tutto quello, che i cuori sentivano. Il vapore, preso allegramente l'abbrivo, si diresse trionfalmente alla lanterna, a S. Pier d'Arena, poi voltò di bordo e andò verso il promontorio d'Albaro, per poi ritornare al porto.

LA PLATEA, 17 OCTOBER 1876, REPRINTED IN AND QUOTED FROM GIUSEPPE VERDI, *GENOVESE*, ED. ROBERTO IOVINO AND STEFANO VERDINO (LUCCA, 2000), 145.

Or che mi direte voi, signori italiani, che nell'epopea del 1848 non trovaste canti più atti ad accendervi d'irresistibile spirito nazionale, che le melodie del *Nabucco*, dei *Lombardi*, dell'*Ernani*, dei *Due Foscari* e del *Macbeth*...

GIOVANNI BOVIO, 'LETTERATURA ED ARTI. GIUSEPPE VERDI', *EMPORIO PITTORESCO*, 13-19 MARCH 1881, 125-8, 125.

La musica dell'avvenire oggi vantasi tale per soverchio di alcuni meccanismi fonici e scenici, ma quanto allo spirito, Verdi la intonò a meraviglia, sin da quando, presentatosi sotto le forme di Zaccaria nel *Nabucco*, cantò all'uditorio attonito:

Del futuro nel bujo discendo:

Ecco rotta l'indegna catena!

Era musica del presente e dell'avvenire, perché interpretava e vaticinava; lamentava i dolori e la vergogna della catena e presentiva la riscossa. Tutta l'orchestra insieme con la voce, all'unisono, annunzia che *sulla perfida arena scoppia il furore del Leone di Giuda*. Rapidamente nell'intuizione profetica si succedono il francamento del popolo servo e la rovina babilonica. E la chiusa di quelle stupende note presaghe mentre annunzia le rovine ha concitamento vibrato d'inno, perché le pietre disperse di Babilonia significano il precipitoso passaggio delle tirannidi, anche nel loro fastigio.

CHAPTER TWO

Don Carlo as Monument

He cannot learn to forget but always remains
attached to the past: however far and fast he
runs, the chain runs with him.¹

Friedrich Nietzsche, 1874

Within the space of three weeks, in March 1868, two eagerly-awaited operas by living Italian composers made their way onto the stage of La Scala, each causing an uproar: Boito's *Mefistofele* and Verdi's *Don Carlo*. These performances were world and Milanese premieres respectively, one of the reasons for the generous space granted them both in the local press. Despite their markedly different levels of audience success – *Mefistofele* was a complete fiasco and was withdrawn after three nights, *Don Carlo* would go on to repeat performances at the next carnival season – both works raised doubts concerning their sheer length: they each lasted around five hours.² To be sure, most of the operas staged at La Scala during the winter 1867-68 were large-scale: Rossini's *Guglielmo Tell*, Gounod's *Romeo e Giulietta* and Auber's *La muta di Portici* came along together with Verdi's more modestly-sized *Un ballo in maschera*.³ One could hardly think of a more 'monumental' season for an Italian theatre during that period. But even within this context, *Don Carlo* in particular struck many because of its astonishing

¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life* (Indianapolis, 1980 [1874]), 8.

² *Mefistofele* was premiered on 5 March 1868; *Don Carlo* on 25 March; see Pompeo Cambiasi, *La Scala 1778-1889: note storiche e statistiche* (Milan, 1889), 302-3. The now commonly performed *Mefistofele* is a second, shorter version dating from 1875. For the first performances and information about the first version, see Piero Nardi, *Vita di Arrigo Boito* (Verona, 1942), 249-320, and Jay Nicolaisen, 'The First *Mefistofele*', *19th-Century Music*, 1/3 (1978), 221-32. Premiered at the Paris Opéra on 11 March 1867 (as *Don Carlos*, and in French), Verdi's opera was first performed in Italy under Angelo Mariani's baton at the Teatro Comunale di Bologna on 26 October 1867 (in the Italian translation by Achille de Lauzières). Subsequent stagings took place in Turin (25 December 1867) and Rome (9 February 1868). For a list of performances in Italy and abroad, see Thomas G. Kaufman, *Verdi and His Major Contemporaries: A Selected Chronology of Performances with Casts* (New York and London, 1990), 497-527. I will mostly refer to the opera with its Italian title, except when the French version is explicitly invoked.

³ See Cambiasi, *La Scala*, 302-3.

proportions: depictions of the opera as a ‘colossus’ were found in abundance in the press reports.⁴

There is, however, a more arresting way in which Verdi’s work was portrayed by Italian critics. On several occasions, journalists hailed it as an ‘imperishable monument of art’, one of ‘the most distinguished musical monuments of the modern age’.⁵ Alas, one looks in vain for an explanation of what exactly critics meant by ‘monument’ (they were, for once, rather less than voluble on this point). The most tempting explanations are, on the one hand, the opera’s grandeur and extreme length (a legacy of the genre of *grand opéra*, in which *Don Carlo* is embedded); and, on the other, the nationalist tone with which musical debates, particularly those about Verdi, had come to be imbued by the end of the 1860s – in Italy as elsewhere. That *Don Carlo* was to stir up endless arguments between two factions – those who thought Verdi had ‘remained himself’ and those who believed he had surrendered to *la musica dell’avvenire* – was indeed clear from its very first Parisian performances in March 1867.⁶ Many French journalists had accused Verdi of having become an imitator of Meyerbeer and Wagner, thus losing his individual character. The fact, moreover, that most of them regarded *Don Carlos* as a French rather than an Italian opera – hence the national importance of the Parisian premiere⁷ – could only add to the political colour of the debates. On

⁴ In Milan as elsewhere: ‘colossale creazione’ (‘F.’, in *Il mondo artistico*, 29 March 1868, 1); ‘forme colossali dell’epopea musicale’ (*Il pungolo*, quoted from Supplemento al n. 13 della *GMM*, 29 March 1868, 3); ‘grandioso spartito’ (*GMM*, 5 April 1868, 108); ‘colossale spartito’ (*Il tergesteo*, quoted from *GMM*, 8 November 1868, 366); ‘un’opera colossale’ (Filippo Filippi, ‘Studio analitico sul *Don Carlo* di Giuseppe Verdi (I),’ *GMM*, 31 January 1869, 33-5, 34); ‘lavoro gigantesco’ (Giuseppe Barini, in *Il mondo artistico*, 25 April 1869, 3).

⁵ ‘monumento di arte imperituro’: *Il tergesteo*, quoted from *GMM*, 8 November 1868, 366; ‘nessuno più mette in dubbio che il *Don Carlo* debba essere annoverato fra i più insigni monumenti musicali dell’epoca moderna’: a critic for a performance in Brussels, quoted from *GMM*, 22 March 1868, 94; ‘monumento del progresso vero della scuola italiana’: Sangiorgi, in *Monitore di Bologna*, 28 October 1867, quoted from *Le opere di Giuseppe Verdi a Bologna (1843-1901)*, ed. Luigi Verdi (Lucca, 2001), 158; ‘È un superbo lavoro, è una stupenda creazione, è un monumento d’arte imperituro!’: Corinno Mariotti, in *GMM*, 29 December 1867, 410.

⁶ The expression *musica dell’avvenire* had been circulating in Italy since the late 1850s, and was common in Milan around 1860. Wagner’s music, with which the term was often associated, was first heard in Italy in the late 1860s in the form of a few overtures performed in Milan, followed by the famous Bologna performance of *Lohengrin* in 1871. Thus it was Wagner’s writings, rather than his music, that mainly fuelled debates during the 1860s; see Carlos del Cueto, ‘Opera in 1860s Milan and the End of the Rossinian Tradition’ (Ph.D. diss., University of Cambridge, 2011), 71-5.

⁷ See *Giuseppe Verdi, Don Carlos: Dossier de presse parisienne (1867)*, ed. Harvé Gartoux (Heilbronn, 1997), 6-9, and del Cueto, ‘Opera in 1860s Milan’, 181.

the Italian side, discussions were equally high pitched. Most critics sought, predictably given the composer's national status, to defend Verdi's latest work at all costs; but even the most supportive noticed that, for all the traditional set-pieces embedded in the score, his style had undergone deep transformations. Verdi's departure from conventional forms in various numbers, his use of rich orchestral colours and his *declamato* writing for the voices, were repeatedly pointed out as deviations from his country's musical tradition.

In this chapter, I should like to explore nineteenth-century claims about *Don Carlo*'s monumentality. I shall first of all ask to what extent such statements may have been motivated by reasons of national pride in late-1860s Italy. I will then consider a different possibility: that the word 'monument' be an acknowledgment of well-definable aesthetic qualities. I will do so by examining two sets of nineteenth-century writings on music that can clarify whether musical monuments are characterised by particular stylistic aspects. Most of the time, monuments display their cargo of (apparently) unshakable solidity. What I should like to address here, however, is their historically contingent, and thus perpetually shifting, meaning. In the case of Verdi's last *grand opéra*, such meaning was not only tied to contemporary attitudes to the past, the present and the future; it was also remoulded by the composer in the years to come.⁸

Temporal frontiers

Soon after the first phase of Italian Unification came to an end in 1861, most Italian cities underwent rapid transformation.⁹ Old buildings were pulled down and wider roads created to improve communications and circulation, and to address some of

⁸ As is well known, *Don Carlo* exists in multiple forms. The main ones are: the 1867, French, five-act version (translated into Italian by de Lauzières); the 1872 Italian edition (made for Naples and containing only two revised numbers); the 1884 four-act and the 1886 five-act versions, both first performed in Italian (in Milan and Modena respectively). On the genesis of the opera and its various revisions, see Andrew Porter, 'The Making of *Don Carlos*', *Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association*, 98 (1971-72), 73-88; Ursula Günther, 'La genèse de *Don Carlos*', *Revue de musicologie*, 58/1 (1972), 16-64; 60/1-2 (1974), 87-158; Günther, 'La genèse du *Don Carlos* de Verdi: nouveaux documents', *Revue de musicologie*, 72/1 (1986), 104-17; the preface to '*Don Carlos*': *edizione integrale delle varie versioni in cinque e in quattro atti di Giuseppe Verdi*, ed. Ursula Günther (Milan, 1980); and Julian Budden, *The Operas of Verdi*, 3 vols. (Oxford, 2001-2002 [1973-81]), III, *From Don Carlos to Falstaff*, 3-157.

⁹ Venice and Rome would become part of the Italian Kingdom in 1866 and 1870 respectively.

the problems caused by the rapid population growth.¹⁰ In the process, commemorative plaques and monuments were inserted into the new urban landscape, ones intended to celebrate figures of local and national importance from both the recent and less recent past. While the peak in Italian monument-building came in the 1880s and 1890s, particularly during the various governments led by Francesco Crispi, some of these new objects in stone were already on display in the 1860s.¹¹ The case of Milan – the most industrialised Italian city and one of the first to be liberated – deserves close attention.

As early as 1859, the year the Austrians were expelled from Lombardy, a plan for restyling Milan's city centre was discussed by municipal authorities. At its core was the widening of Piazza Duomo through demolition of a number of old buildings, as well as the creation of a sumptuous Galleria that would connect the cathedral square with Piazza della Scala.¹² The Galleria was begun in 1865 under the direction of architect Francesco Mengoni, and opened in 1867 (although it would not be finished until 1878). Significantly, it was conceived as a tribute to Italy's first king, Vittorio Emanuele II, after whom it was named; twenty-five statues of illustrious Italians were placed within it to display Italy's achievements in art and science.¹³ Throughout the 1860s and 1870s, and in subsequent years, monuments were also raised in various Milanese squares to the memory of Italians such as Cavour (1865), Cesare Beccaria (1871), Leonardo da Vinci (1872) and Alessandro Manzoni (1883). Further works included the construction of the Stazione centrale, the Cimitero monumentale and the institution of the Museo patrio di archeologia.¹⁴ Within only a few years, Milan's old medieval centre was

¹⁰ These works of urban renewal clearly echoed those started in Paris by Baron Haussmann in the 1850s. Paris was the model to which many Italian cities, particularly Milan, looked on their way to modernisation; see Elisabetta Colombo, *Come si governava Milano: politiche pubbliche nel secondo Ottocento* (Milan, 2005), 38-9.

¹¹ Francesco Crispi was Prime Minister in 1887-91 and 1893-96, during which time he persistently encouraged the cult of national heroes; see Christopher Duggan, 'Francesco Crispi, "Political Education" and the Problem of Italian National Consciousness, 1860-1896', *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 2/2 (1997), 141-66, esp. 157-8.

¹² See Colombo, *Come si governava Milano*, 41-2.

¹³ See Felice Venosta, *The Traveller's Guide of Milan and Its Environs, the Certosa near Pavia with a Description of Brianza and the Lakes*, trans. E. C. Cornaro (Milan, 1873), 47-8.

¹⁴ See *Storia di Milano*, 16 vols. (Milan, 1953-62), XV, *Nell'Unità italiana (1859-1900)*, 387-455, esp. 395-424.

deeply transformed; in no other Italian city did the old and the new become so tightly intertwined.¹⁵

The aim of this wide-ranging plan of urban remodelling was twofold. On the one hand, Milan was rehearsing a vision of the Italian past; on the other, it was attempting by way of urban renewal to fulfil its ambition as the Italian capital of culture, progress and industrialisation. The city's reconstruction was, in short, a tool for renewing civic identity, for helping to shape an imagined national community as well as for displaying a proud commitment to European modernity.¹⁶ The ambiguity of this project, which implied a strenuous defence of the past as much as projection towards the future, often emerged from writings of the period. As early as 1866, Arrigo Boito raised his voice against the widespread demolition, exclaiming sarcastically: 'Hoes, axes, chisels, / battering rams, hammers, / instruments of massacre and devastation, / power is in your hands, oh restless age!'.¹⁷ A few years later, journalist Carlo Romussi was similarly distraught: 'a memory of the past disappears every day in the straightening of a street or the creation of space for a larger house'.¹⁸ Yet alongside arguments drenched in nostalgia, one could hear very different sentiments, ones that read curiously today:

[Milano] non è la necropoli archeologica [...] Milano non ha ad ogni piè sospinto le lapidi indicatrici della grandezza passata, ma quelle che indicano la grandezza presente; non ha i monumenti della morte...¹⁹

¹⁵ See Colombo, *Come si governava Milano*, 37.

¹⁶ Colombo underlines that the works of renovation had both practical functions (improving hygienic conditions and communications) and subtle political and cultural aims; see Colombo, *Come si governava Milano*, 37-9. In his book on Bologna, Axel Körner has called for a re-examination of the traditional image of *fine secolo* Italy as 'a nation obsessed with its own traditions', indifferent to foreign debates about modernity. He has suggested that Italian cultural policies in the decades following Unification were often a means of engaging with the European experience of modernity in its aesthetic manifestation represented by modernism; see Körner, *Politics of Culture in Liberal Italy: From Unification to Fascism* (New York and London, 2009), esp. 2-3 and 264-6. The reference for an 'imagined national community' is, of course, to Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London and New York, 2006 [1983]).

¹⁷ 'Zappe, scuri, scarpelli, / arïeti, martelli, / istrumenti di strage e di ruina, / l'impero è vostro! O tempi irrequïeti!': Arrigo Boito, "'Case nuove" o le rovine di Milano' (1866), in Arrigo Boito, *Tutti gli scritti*, ed. Piero Nardi (Verona, 1942), 11. Similar shouts of dismay were heard in France and came from poets such as Baudelaire, Hugo and Bouilhet; see Arnaldo Di Benedetto, "'Case nuove" o le rovine di Milano', in Arrigo Boito, ed. Giovanni Morelli (Venice, 1994), 15-33.

¹⁸ 'ogni giorno sparisce una memoria antica, per raddrizzare una contrada, per far luogo ad una casa più grande': Carlo Romussi, *Milano nei suoi monumenti* (Milan, 1875), 396.

¹⁹ Luigi Sacconi, *Auguri all'Italia ed omaggio a Milano* (Milan, 1870), 10. The obvious, implied term of comparison here is Rome, a city burdened with the weight of its past.

CHAPTER TWO

[[Milan] is not the archaeological necropolis [...] Milan is not scattered with gravestones pointing to its former greatness, but with those showing its present greatness; it does not have monuments to death...]

The remains of the past were not always alluring: sometimes disparagingly referred to as *anticaglie*, they were often disdained as obstacles to the development of an efficient, industrial, truly modern city. The new identity of Milan would emerge from this contested ground.

In recent years, the role played by monuments, museums, archives and various practices of commemoration in the processes of nation-building and the construction of collective identities has received great attention from scholars in various fields. The key work is *Les Lieux de mémoire*, an extensive series of essays by French historians, edited by Pierre Nora between the 1980s and the early 1990s.²⁰ Under the umbrella term of *lieux de mémoire* are collected all those objects and sites, whether real or symbolic, in which the memory of a group seems to have ‘crystallized’, and through which a sense of identity is preserved.²¹ Nora’s highly influential project, which focuses on French nineteenth-century ‘memory sites’, rapidly gave rise to others that are similar (if less exhaustive) in scope. The category of *lieu de mémoire* has thus also been applied to practices of collective memory in other countries.²² This research marks a more general interest in memory studies that has continued since the 1970s. According to Nora, the attention paid during the last few decades to memory and history is the result not only of twentieth-century political and economic crises, but also of what he has called the increasing “‘acceleration” of history’: the ever greater speed at which our world moves – a world in which the future appears ever less predictable, leading to an obsessive attachment to the past.²³

²⁰ *Les Lieux de mémoire*, ed. Pierre Nora, 7 vols. (Paris, 1984-92). For two English translations, see Chapter One, fn. 38.

²¹ Nora himself uses the term ‘crystallized’ in his ‘Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*’, *Representations* 26 (1989), 7-24, 7.

²² For Italy see, for instance, Bruno Tobia, *Una patria per gli italiani: spazi, itinerari, monumenti nell’Italia unita, 1870-1900* (Bari, 1991); *I luoghi della memoria*, ed. Mario Isnenghi, 3 vols. (Bari, 1996-97); and Ilaria Porciani, *La festa della nazione: rappresentazione dello Stato e spazi sociali nell’Italia unita* (Bologna, 1997).

²³ Nora, ‘General Introduction’, in *Rethinking France: Les Lieux de mémoire*, ed. Pierre Nora, trans. Mary Trouille, 4 vols. (Chicago, 2001-10), I, *The State*, vii-xxii, xviii. The increasing unpredictability of the future, as the modern, linear concept of time arises in the late eighteenth

However fruitful Nora's *lieu de mémoire* has proved in various research areas, it nevertheless appears in need of some revision. Ann Rigney, in an article about the 1859 celebrations for the hundredth anniversary of Robert Burns' birth, calls attention to the 'performative turn' in memory studies during the last decade, with scholars increasingly shifting their focus 'from static "sites" to performances' of memory.²⁴ Nora's *lieu de mémoire*, owing both to the term itself and to the way the category has been used by historians, seems to suggest that monuments, museums and other 'memory sites' behave as containers carrying an unchanging memorial content – as tools for narrating over and over again the same story about the past. Possibly because of the very notion of *lieu*, which suggests rootedness and stability, or because most 'memory sites' are objects capable of withstanding the passing of time, Nora's term seems to overlook one point: that memory, whether individual or collective, is never static, but rather remoulds itself continuously.²⁵

The fixity of the meaning often attributed to monuments and their like with respect to their action as memory and identity 'inducers' comes with a second difficulty: that of reconciling their more obvious function of presenting visions of the past with their simultaneous (but less evident) delivery of perceptions and concerns about the future. National monuments are a clear example of tools for remembrance, ones that have stimulated much scholarly interest. As early as the 1970s, German historian George L. Mosse, in his groundbreaking work on the new aesthetics of politics in the age of nationalism and the rise of the masses, described – in the German context – how the style and function of national monuments evolved in the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. According to Mosse, monuments served as tangible manifestations of the myths and symbols that sustained the nation; they were an integral part of a new, secular religion.²⁶ Only a few years later, in an article titled 'La "statuomanie" et l'histoire', Maurice

century, is also the main reason for the proliferation of 'memory sites' in the nineteenth century. On the modern concept of time, see Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, trans. Keith Tribe (Cambridge, MA, and London, 1985).

²⁴ Ann Rigney, 'Embodied Communities: Commemorating Robert Burns, 1859', *Representations*, 115/1 (2011), 71-101, 77.

²⁵ Of course, the model is more complicated: memory can remain static for a given period of time, and some aspects of it are more prone to change than others.

²⁶ George L. Mosse, *The Nationalization of the Masses: Political Symbolism and Mass Movements in Germany from the Napoleonic Wars through the Third Reich* (Ithaca and London, 1996), 7-8 and 50-1.

Agulhon examined the explosion of monument building in France after the end of the *ancien régime*. Again, his attention fell on the political meanings and readings of the past conveyed by monuments at different stages of France's nineteenth-century history.²⁷ Further work on monuments and commemorative practices has come from scholars in recent years.²⁸ Overall, however, the emphasis has remained on the ways in which these 'memory sites' – to continue with Nora's problematic expression – served political and ideological functions, asserting images of the past and shaping present collective identities.

In what follows, I should like to explore some nineteenth-century Italian responses to Verdi's *Don Carlo* from a less steady perspective. The reasons for and implications of depicting the opera as a monument were indeed more complex, and included an attempt to envision an Italian (musical) future. First, however, I need to examine briefly the more notorious construction of the *composer* as a monument. I shall do this by taking a closer look at 'the man Verdi' through the looking-glass of some of his least perishable nineteenth-century representations.

Giuseppe Verdi: *l'uomo di pietra*²⁹

Oui, c'est lui! C'est le fils de la Muse sévère,
 Qui, sur tant de chefs-d'œuvre, éleva son *Trouvère*;
 L'aigle des monts Alpains, l'aigle des hauts sommets;
 Ces lignes où la force à la grâce est unie
 Et qui brillent au front des hommes de génie,
 Grâce à vous, Dantan, ne s'éteindront jamais!³⁰

[Yes, it is him! It is the son of the rigorous Muse, / who elevates his *Trouvère* above so many other masterpieces; / the eagle of the Alps, the eagle of the high mountaintops; /

²⁷ Maurice Agulhon, 'La "statuomanie" et l'histoire', *Ethnologie Française*, 8/1 (1978), 145-72.

²⁸ See, for instance, William Cohen, 'Symbols of Power: Statues in Nineteenth-Century Provincial France', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 31/3 (1989), 491-513; Tobia, *Una patria per gli italiani*; and Roland Quinault, 'The Cult of the Centenary, c. 1784-1914', *Historical Research*, 71/176 (1998), 303-23.

²⁹ 'Uomo di pietra' (in Milanese dialect 'omm de preja') is the name of an ancient Roman sculpture in Milan representing a man wearing a toga. Its location changed several times and the original head was removed and replaced with a new one in the Middle Ages. In the nineteenth century, the Milanese used to leave satirical political messages near the sculpture, a practice that gave its name to the satirical paper *L'uomo di pietra* (1856-59); see Francesco Ogliari, *Le statue di Milano* (Pavia, 2002), 45-7.

³⁰ The poem, dedicated to sculptor Jean-Pierre Dantan, was published in an article by Ralph, 'Une soirée chez Verdi', *L'Art musical*, 22 February 1866, 92-3, 92. For an English translation of this article, see Marcello Conati, *Interviews and Encounters with Verdi*, trans. Richard Stokes (London, 1984), 44-53.

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those traits where force and grace are united / and that shine in the faces of men of genius, / thanks to you, Dantan, will never be extinguished!]

So reads the opening stanza of a poem by François-Joseph Méry, composed in 1866 and entitled *Le Buste de Verdi*. Méry, Verdi's collaborator in the preparation of the French *Don Carlos* libretto, goes on to describe the process through which sculptor Jean-Pierre Dantan infuses inanimate stone with life.³¹ The final product looks so surprisingly alive that 'devant le modèle on s'écrie: Ils sont deux!'. The poem was written for a *soirée* organised by Verdi at his apartment on the Champs Élysées in Paris in February 1866. Unable to attend the gathering, Méry sent a letter with the poem, which was conceived as an homage to both Verdi and Dantan. The latter had recently finished a bust of the composer (see Figure 2.1), the reason for the celebrations at Verdi's home. According to later reports, the sculpture was displayed in the foyer of the Opéra only a few days after the premiere of *Don Carlos*.³²

The significance of this 1866 bust to my argument lies in its invitation to reflect on ways in which, during the late nineteenth and especially early twentieth centuries, Verdi's image was increasingly expressed in imperishable materials (stone, marble and metal). One likely explanation is of course the prestige the composer, by around 1860, had gained as an artistic as well as political figure on a both national and international level. Soon after Unification, at a time when Italy was facing political and financial problems and its international reputation was distinctly precarious, Verdi and his operas were being accorded the awe and respect national monuments are usually intended to awaken. For the same reason, in

³¹ Verdi's second librettist for *Don Carlos* was Camille du Locle. News that the bust had been finished appeared in *L'Art musical* on 1 and 8 February 1866 (70 and 79). The latter issue also quoted comments on the sculpture by M. de Thémines (alias Achille de Lauzières), writing in *La Patrie*. The episode was thus clearly advertised in several French newspapers.

³² See Pougin, *Vita aneddotica*, 121; *Verdi intimo: carteggio di Giuseppe Verdi con il Conte Opprandino Arrivabene (1861-1886)*, ed. Annibale Alberti (Milan, 1931), 75; and Conati, *Verdi*, 48-9. Verdi himself commented on the bust in letters to Tito Ricordi (28 January 1866) and Arrivabene (16 February 1866); see Mary Jane Phillips-Matz, *Verdi: A Biography* (Oxford and New York, 1993), 509 and 853; and *Verdi intimo*, 68-9. Three copies of this bust, slightly different in size but all dating from 1866, are preserved at the Musée Carnavalet; see Philippe Sorel, 'Catalogue sommaire des œuvres sérieuses de Dantan Jeune conservées au Musée Carnavalet', in *Dantan Jeune: Caricatures et portraits de la société romantique*, Collections du Musée Carnavalet (Paris, 1989), 181-252, here 236.

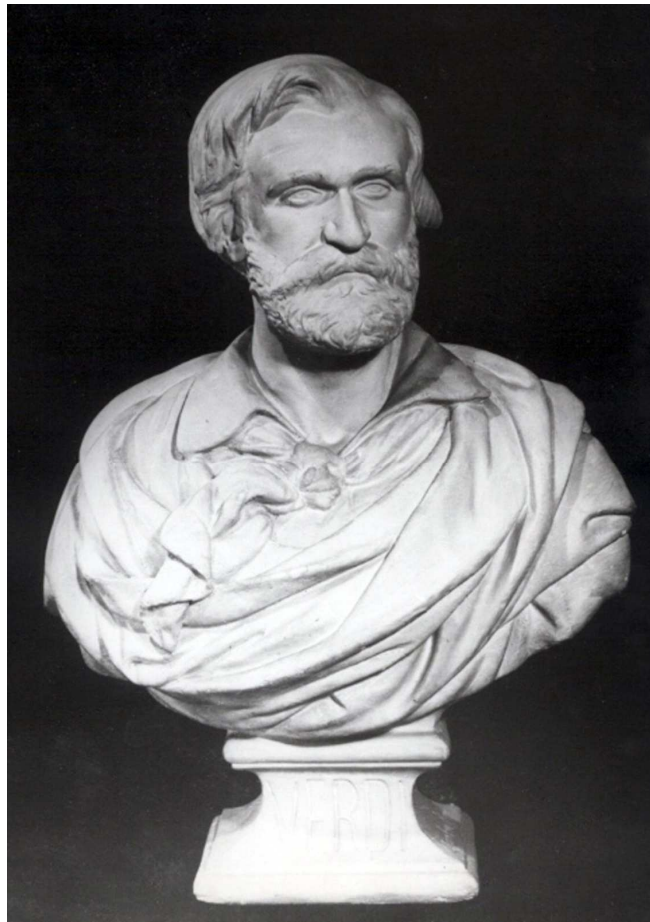


Figure 2.1: Jean-Pierre Dantan, bust of Giuseppe Verdi; reproduced by permission of the Biblioteca Livia Simoni, Milan.

subsequent decades Italians raised monuments to Verdi also in a more literal sense. The proliferation of Verdi medals and statues, as well as streets and squares named after him, was certainly due to ongoing appropriation for nationalist agendas. The commemorative events that followed his death in 1901 and the centennial of his birth in 1913, most of which were organised independently by various Italian municipalities in competition with each other, often included the commission of a monument or the issuing of a medal for the occasion (see Figure 2.2).³³ The most

³³ See Laura Basini, 'Cults of Sacred Memory: Parma and the Verdi Centennial Celebrations of 1913', *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 13/2 (2001), 141-61, here 142-3. The sheer increase in the number of Verdi medals issued after 1901 is apparent in the collections described in Giorgio Nataletti-Antonio Pagani, 'Le medaglie di Giuseppe Verdi', in *Verdi: studi e memorie*, ed. Sindicato nazionale fascista musicisti (Rome, 1941), 401-82; and Giampiero Tintori, 'Le medaglie verdiane nelle collezioni del Museo teatrale alla Scala', in *Atti del III° congresso internazionale di studi verdiani*, ed. Mario Medici and Marcello Pavarani (Parma, 1974), 587-606.

famous monuments built in Verdi's memory (such as the ones in Milan, Parma and Trieste) date from the first or second decade of the twentieth century.

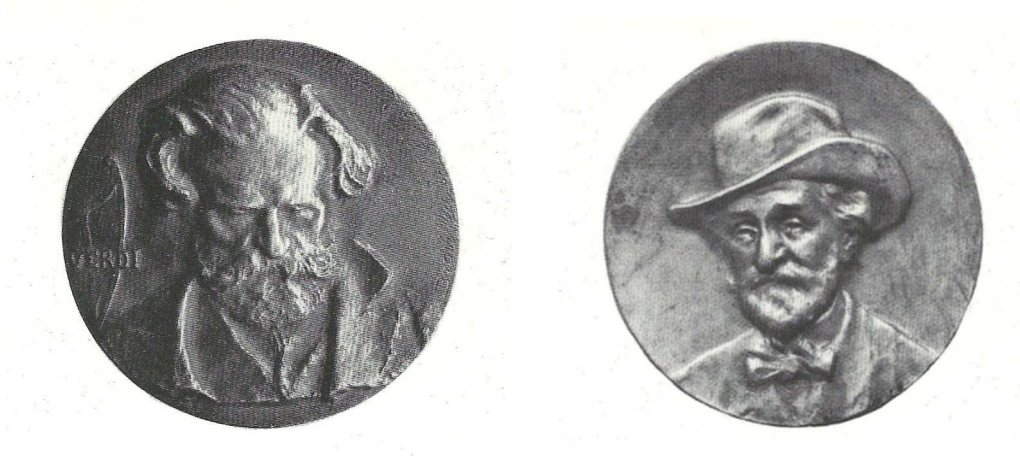


Figure 2.2: Two Verdi medals; reproduced from Giampiero Tintori, 'Le medaglie verdiane nelle collezioni del Museo teatrale alla Scala', in *Atti del III° congresso internazionale di studi verdiani*, ed. Mario Medici and Marcello Pavarani (Parma, 1974), 587-606.

The number of Verdi busts, statues and medals dating from the *nineteenth* century is, on the other hand, surprisingly small.³⁴ Dantan's bust is a very early example. What is most striking, the sculpture was placed in the foyer of the Opéra (a French theatre!) immediately after the lukewarm premiere of *Don Carlos*.³⁵ The two most famous Verdi busts sculpted by an Italian artist – those by Vincenzo Gemito, one in terracotta, the other in bronze – date from 1873, and were produced on the composer's commission in Naples, as was a further one of his wife Giuseppina. They were not intended, that is, for public display; instead, they were delivered directly to Verdi's home at Sant'Agata.³⁶ More interesting still, when a few years

³⁴ Among the earliest (not only Italian) tributes to Verdi of this kind are a few medals dating from 1850, 1867 and 1872. They are all reproduced in Nataletti-Pagani, *Le medaglie di Giuseppe Verdi*, 403-6.

³⁵ As is well known, the opera's premiere in Paris was hardly a success; it is usually described as a *succès d'estime*; see Julian Budden, *Verdi* (London, 1993), 96. Critics' responses overall reflected the national (besides musical) importance of the event. For a selection of press articles, see *Giuseppe Verdi, Don Carlos: Dossier*.

³⁶ See Frank Walker, 'Vincenzo Gemito and his Bust of Verdi', *Music & Letters*, 30/1 (1949), 44-55. As early as 1854, however, Tito Ricordi had commissioned a bust of Verdi from Vincenzo Luccardi. The sculpture was intended for Ricordi's house, although it remained exposed in the Ricordi shop for some time together with a bust of Rossini. Apparently the Verdi bust was also displayed at the Rome Exposition that year. In 1859, by then unhappy with the sculpture, Luccardi

later Milan dedicated a statue to its most famous (living) adopted son, the news aroused a good deal of debate.

In April 1880, following the triumphant success of *Aida* at the Paris Opéra, a group of distinguished Milanese suggested celebrating Verdi in a solemn ceremony and dedicating to him a statue that would join those of Rossini and Donizetti in the foyer of La Scala.³⁷ The news appeared in various local newspapers and caused comment about the appropriateness of dedicating a monument to a living person. ‘The idea of erecting a marble monument to an illustrious living man’ – commented Dottor Verità (alias Leone Fortis) in *Il pungolo* – ‘makes some shudder with dismay’.³⁸ While busts and statues of the living were already common abroad, the habit of solidifying into stone someone still breathing, the critic argued, remained unusual in Italy. Furthermore, the decision to produce such an enduring portrait implied that the person’s fame was at an insuperable height, and unlikely to fade.³⁹ In 1880 Verdi did indeed meet (or at least so it was claimed) this last condition; his artistic triumph in Paris provided the final impetus for the decision about solemn *onoranze*. However, immortalising the living composer and adding his statue alongside those of his buried predecessors felt problematic; all the more so given that a statue of Bellini was also commissioned, a few weeks later, for the same occasion. In October 1881, the year of Milan’s National Industrial Exhibition, the long-departed and the alive-and-

decided to produce a new one, which, to Verdi’s great regret, was damaged en route to Sant’Agata in 1860; see the correspondence in *Carteggio Verdi-Luccardi*, ed. Laura Genesio (Parma, 2008), 123-4, 130-3 and 138-42; and Frank Walker, *The Man Verdi* (London, 1962), 310-11.

³⁷ Paris did not hear *Aida* until April 1876, when the opera was first staged at the Théâtre Italien. The premiere at the Opéra took place on 22 March 1880; see Kaufman, *Verdi*, 530-1.

³⁸ ‘La idea che si eriga un monumento marmoreo ad un illustre vivente mette i brividi dello sgomento a certuni’: Dottor Verità [Leone Fortis], ‘Arte italiana. La statua a Verdi’, *Il pungolo*, 20-21 April 1880, 3. Similar comments can be read in an article from *L’illustrazione italiana*, 18 April 1880, 243, reproduced in *Carteggio Verdi-Ricordi: 1880-1881*, ed. Pierluigi Petrobelli, Marisa Di Gregorio Casati and Carlo Matteo Mossa (Parma, 1988), 244.

³⁹ ‘Certo l’uomo illustre che deve essere tradotto in statua di marmo deve essere di una statura scultoria – moralmente parlando – [...] certo bisogna che la sua fama, che la sua gloria sieno ormai, per virtù propria, sottratte alla discussione contemporanea – che l’una e l’altra siano tali da rendere impossibile che nulla più le offuschi o le scemi’: Fortis, ‘Arte italiana’. The most famous exception made for a living composer in Italy is that of Rossini, whose monument in Pesaro was built in 1864. For a much earlier example abroad, Louis-François Roubiliac’s Handel monument in Vauxhall Gardens from 1738, see Suzanne Aspden, ‘“Fam’d Handel Breathing, tho’ Transformed to Stone”: The Composer as Monument’, *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 55/1 (2002), 39-90.

kicking came together to form the image of Italy's nineteenth-century music history (see Figures 2.3 and 2.4).⁴⁰

The 1881 Verdi (and Bellini) celebrations were in many ways local rather than national. Not only did the idea arise from a group of Milanese, but almost all the authorities at the statues' inauguration were from that city (with just one representative, the prefect, sent by the central government).⁴¹ This is less surprising when we consider that most of Italy's post-1861 monuments to politicians, revolutionaries, artists and intellectuals who had glorified the nation were based on a municipal initiative and paid for through public subscription. It is nevertheless also true that once the statues of the four composers were reunited and visible in

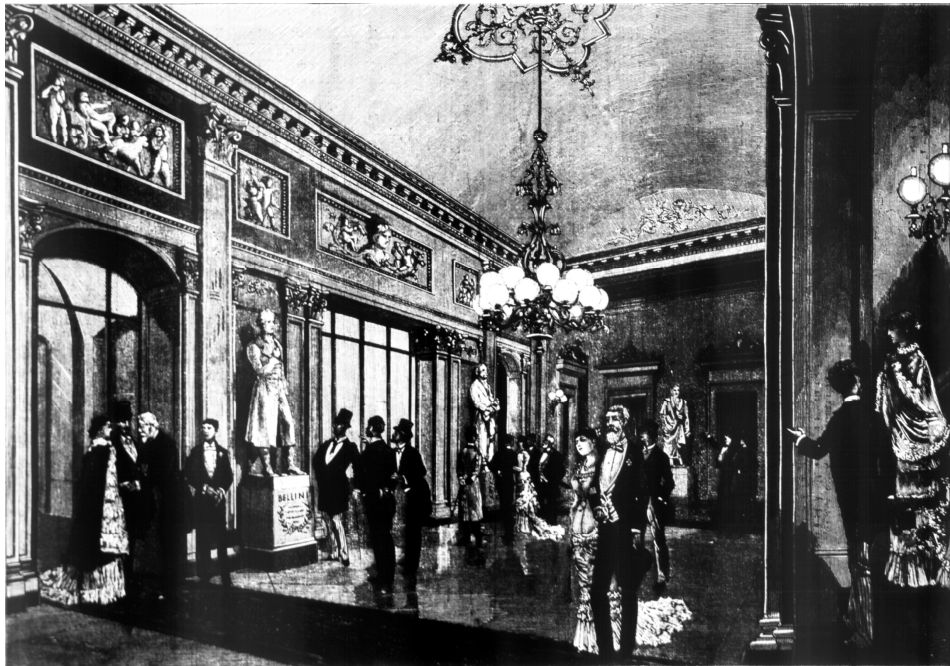


Figure 2.3: The foyer of the Teatro alla Scala, with the new busts of Bellini and Verdi. Drawing by Antonio Bonamore, *L'illustrazione italiana*, 27 November 1881, 349.

⁴⁰ 'È parso che quei quattro sommi dovrebbero avere qualcosa da dirsi in fatto di arte, e che a metterli assieme non si farebbe che tradurre in marmo la storia della musica italiana del nostro secolo': Fortis, 'Arte italiana'. The statue of Verdi was sculpted by Francesco Barzaghi, while that of Bellini by Ambrogio Borghi. For more on these events, see the letters and newspaper articles in *Carteggio Verdi-Ricordi: 1880-1881*, 31-4, 40-3, 94-8, 242-61 and 313-16.

⁴¹ See *Carteggio Verdi-Ricordi: 1880-1881*, 243, and *La perseveranza*, 26 October 1881, 2.



Figure 2.4: Statue of Verdi (by Barzaghi) in the foyer of La Scala; reproduced by permission of the Biblioteca Livia Simoni, Milan.

the foyer of La Scala, their significance was far from merely Milanese; nor did they stand exclusively for a national parade of artistic talents. The frozen figures of the ‘four greats’ also served a practical function: they were reminders, tangible models of where Italian music should develop in the future, and they appeared at a time when that future no longer seemed clear. ‘The honours granted to a living maestro’ – observed Lodovico Melzi, the president of the committee for the celebrations – ‘will encourage and advise the young, who are not always moved by tributes to

those beyond the grave'.⁴² In the context of late-nineteenth-century disputes between supporters and detractors of foreign or Italian music, modern portraits of composers could serve a hortatory function. The same function, as it happens, that on other occasions could be fulfilled by musical compositions.

Buried music

In May 1868 the Teatro Nuovo in Florence presented a work distinctly at odds with contemporary trends in the repertoire of most Italian theatres: Domenico Cimarosa's *Il matrimonio segreto*. This two-act *dramma giocoso*, first performed in Vienna in 1792, achieved great success in Florence and was then revived elsewhere in Italy. Although these performances always took place in minor theatres, they provided a ready stimulus for critical debate.⁴³ On various occasions Cimarosa's opera, as well as other similarly 'ancient' works (to which the Cimarosa performances had drawn attention), were welcomed as 'monuments'.⁴⁴ The newness of the idea of reviving an old score, at a time when the operatic seasons in Italy consisted for the most part of either new works or the masterpieces of the four most popular nineteenth-century composers, did not go unremarked. Quite the opposite: it appealed to many. For more than one critic, the 'resurrection' of Cimarosa's opera could (and should) lead to the rediscovery of further works from Italy's operatic past, ones that had been forgotten in 'dusty archives' for too long.⁴⁵ It was not that

⁴² 'L'onore reso ad un maestro vivente sarà stimolo e guida ai giovani, che non sempre si commovono agli onori d'oltre tomba': Lodovico Melzi, speech printed in *La perseveranza*, 26 October 1881, 2.

⁴³ Performances took place in the summer and autumn 1868 at the Teatro Brunetti in Bologna, the Teatro Re in Milan, the Teatro Gallo San Benedetto in Venice, and in Bergamo; see Filebo, 'Critica e rassegna musicale', *Rivista bolognese di scienze, lettere, arti e scuole*, 2/6 (1868), 550-8; *Il mondo artistico*, 11 October 1868, 7; and *Il matrimonio segreto: melodramma giocoso in due atti di Giovanni Bertati, musica del maestro Domenico Cimarosa, composto nel secolo passato cioè nel 1792. Riprodotto nel Teatro Gallo San Benedetto in Venezia l'autunno 1868* (Milan, [1868]).

⁴⁴ 'Monumento d'arte pertanto e maestoso monumento è l'opera del Cimarosa *Il Matrimonio segreto*': Corinno Mariotti, in *GMM*, 6 September 1868, 289. See also Filippo Filippi's statement, quoted later.

⁴⁵ 'polverosi archivi': Filebo, 'Critica e rassegna musicale', 558. The 'resurrectional' idea was also common in France at around the same time. A rediscovery of the old operatic repertoire had been taking place there since the 1850s, while already in the first half of the nineteenth century early instrumental and choral music had become the object of a renewed interest; see Katharine Ellis, *Interpreting the Musical Past: Early Music in Nineteenth-Century France* (New York, 2005); and

such operas would become fashionable or sound attractively modern; to some ears *Il matrimonio segreto* now seemed as ‘archaic and obsolete’ as once it had seemed ‘new’. (After all, even an opera like Mozart’s *Don Giovanni*, in an operatic centre such as Milan, was rarely performed in the second half of the nineteenth century.)⁴⁶ Rather, ancient scores were monuments first and foremost because they spoke of the age to which they belonged; they were traces of a world no longer in existence.

This new leaning towards the musical past was in line with trends summarised by Nietzsche in 1874 as the ‘consuming historical fever’ of his age.⁴⁷ Several, and not only those outside Italy, raised this point: ‘Our century’ – commented an Italian man of letters in 1869 – ‘is idolatrous of the past. Tirelessly archaeological, it seeks the monuments of our fathers, strives to reassemble the remains of time, writes histories, critiques, biographies’.⁴⁸ In an address concerning the teaching of history, Pasquale Villari likewise argued: ‘We are great restorers and repairers of the past [...] the past has somehow become sacred to us’.⁴⁹ Paradoxically, the more closely we approach the end of the century – an age captivated by the idea of the future, progress and modernity – the more an attentive

Flora Willson, ‘Classic Staging: Pauline Viardot and the 1859 *Orphée* Revival’, *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 22/3 (2010), 301-26. On the changes in repertory and the formation of the notion of the music canon during the nineteenth century, see William Weber, *The Great Transformation of Musical Taste: Concert Programming from Haydn to Brahms* (Cambridge, 2008).

⁴⁶ ‘[*Il matrimonio segreto*] era nuovo quanto ora ci apparisce arcaico e disusato siffattamente da trovarsi perciò troppo lontano dal gusto, dalle tendenze, dal progresso, dalle innovazioni tanto felicemente operate dai molti luminari che succedettero al fortunato allievo di Piccini’: Mariotti, in *GMM*, 6 September 1868, 289. For Mozart performances in Milan, see fn. 51.

⁴⁷ Nietzsche, *On the Advantage and Disadvantage*, 8. Hayden White has called attention to Nietzsche’s critical views of nineteenth-century beliefs in history as an ‘objective’ or ‘scientific’ discipline. According to White, Nietzsche’s historical thought corresponded to the beginning of the ‘crisis of historicism’ and the opening of the ‘third’ phase of the nineteenth-century historical imagination; see White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore and London, 1975), 40-1.

⁴⁸ ‘Il nostro secolo è idolatra del passato. Archeologo instancabile, esso ricerca i monumenti de’ padri, ricomponne faticosamente le spoglie del tempo, scrive storie, critiche, biografie’: Gustavo Strafforello, ‘Saggi filosofici: Natura’, *Rivista contemporanea nazionale italiana*, 17/58 (1869), 246-60, 246.

⁴⁹ ‘Noi siamo dei grandi restauratori e riparatori del passato [...] il passato stesso è come divenuto sacro per noi’: Pasquale Villari, ‘L’insegnamento della storia: discorso inaugurale per l’anno accademico 1868-69’, originally printed in *La scienza del popolo*, 51/6 (1869), available at http://www.liberliber.it/mediateca/libri/v/villari/l_insegnamento_della_storia/pdf/l_inse_p.pdf (here 4; accessed 19 February 2014).

knowledge of the past becomes apparent.⁵⁰ As far as the Italian musical scene was concerned, the last decades of the century were characterised not only by the increasing circulation of foreign works, particularly those of Wagner, and tense debates about *la musica dell'avvenire*, but also by a (slow) rediscovery of older compositions. The Cimarosa performances of 1868 were only the beginning of a trend that would increase in subsequent years.⁵¹

Agedness was not, however, the only reason for Italian commitment to the Cimarosa revivals. According to some, 'ancient' scores were also to be encouraged because they could serve a pragmatic function: they could help combat the futuristic trends increasingly followed by Italian composers writing under the influence of foreign music. Critic Filebo, for instance, in an article prompted by the recent performances of *Il matrimonio segreto*, hoped that these revivals would inaugurate 'the long-awaited reform and restoration of Italian art'. They could, he thought, counterbalance perilous tendencies among modern composers, who were increasingly drawn by vocal and harmonic complexities blowing in from abroad.⁵² In this respect, a few observations made by renowned critic Filippo Filippi, evidently of a different opinion, are telling. Filippi, a warm supporter of Verdi and

⁵⁰ Historical consciousness is a prerequisite of modernity since a modern standpoint makes sense only insofar as it is differentiated from a position situated in the past; see Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, trans. Frederick G. Lawrence (Cambridge, MA, 1990), 6.

⁵¹ In Milan, particularly from the late 1870s, the forgotten eighteenth-century comic opera repertoire started to be rediscovered. Some theatres, such as the Santa Radegonda, were more prone than others to reviving this repertoire. In this respect, see the revivalist proposal by Pompeo Cambiasi, originally in *GMM*, 12 April 1878, quoted in Raffaella Valsecchi in 'Teatri d'opera a Milano, 1861-1880', in *Milano musicale, 1861-1897*, ed. Bianca Maria Antolini (Lucca, 1999), 3-20, here 13-14. Music critic Francesco D'Arcais also encouraged revivals of 'ancient' Italian operas in Turin and Milan in the 1860s, many of which were in fact staged in Florence during those years; see Bianca Maria Antolini, 'Rappresentazioni rossiniane e dibattito critico in Italia nel decennio 1860-70', in *La recezione di Rossini ieri e oggi*, Atti dei convegni Lincei, 110 (Rome, 1994), 121-48, esp. 133-4. Mozart performances in Milan remained, however, extremely rare. *Don Giovanni* was the only Mozart opera staged (twice, in 1871 and 1881) at La Scala after 1836 until the end of the century. The most often performed Mozart opera, it appeared overall seven times on Milanese stages between 1861 and 1897; see Cambiasi, *La Scala*, 278-9, 304-5 and 308-9; and Raffaella Valsecchi and Bianca Maria Antolini, 'Cronologia sintetica delle rappresentazioni d'opera nei teatri milanesi: 1861-1897', in *Milano musicale*, 43-59. On the reception of two Mozart operas in Italy during the nineteenth century, see Pierluigi Petrobelli, 'Don Giovanni in Italia: la fortuna dell'opera ed il suo influsso', *Analecta musicologica*, 18 (1978), 30-51; and Marco Beghelli, 'La precoce fortuna delle *Nozze di Figaro* in Italia', in *Mozart: gli orientamenti della critica moderna*, Atti del convegno internazionale, Cremona, 24-26 novembre 1991, ed. Giacomo Fornari (Lucca, 1994), 181-224.

⁵² 'la tanto sospirata riforma e restaurazione dell'arte italiana': Filebo, 'Critica e rassegna musicale', 558.

increasingly of German music (especially Wagner), reacted against what he described as the ‘ephemeral and exaggerated enthusiasm’ aroused by the Cimarosa revivals:

Il pubblico ha ragione d’entusiasarsi [...] ma hanno torto gli esagerati di gridare al miracolo ad ogni nota, ad ogni battuta, mentre in buona fede io credo che gridino e si scalmanino tanto per ingannare in qualche modo l’effetto reale e spontaneo dello sbadiglio, a cui si avrebbero abbandonato 10 anni fa, quando non c’era questa febbre di reazione d’oggi, questa smania d’anti-progresso, a cui tutto serve di pretesto, anche il nome rispettabile di Cimarosa.

[The audience are right to enthuse [...] but those who exaggerate by hailing as a miracle every single note, every single bar are wrong; while in good faith, I believe they shout and get worked up so much in order to hide their real and spontaneous boredom, to which they would have surrendered ten years ago, when there did not exist today’s fever for reaction, this itch for anti-progress, to which everything serves as a pretext, even the respectable name of Cimarosa.]

Filippi’s claim was that ‘Cimarosa’s opera can be admired only as an historical monument’.⁵³ In other words, despite his alignment to the current vogue of depicting the work as monumental, he disliked such *anticaglie* – as he called the pre-Rossinian works that were fuelling so much debate during that period. Far from providing models for composers at the start of their careers, they should only serve, in his opinion, as documents of a past age.⁵⁴ Thus, once again, as in the aforementioned discussions that would arise about the statues of Verdi and Bellini in 1881, the potential didactic function of monuments came to the fore. This function also explains why monuments were so prone to becoming objects of contestation.

Another episode, at about the same time as the Cimarosa revivals, fostered the description of certain musical works in monumental terms: Rossini’s death in Paris on 13 November 1868. The sad news spread quickly through Italy. Commemorative concerts and opera performances took place in many cities, and busts of Rossini were often placed onstage, almost as if to reassure the audience

⁵³ ‘effimero ed esagerato entusiasmo’, ‘L’opera di Cimarosa è ammirabile ma unicamente come monumento storico’: Filippo Filippi, ‘*Il matrimonio segreto* e la musica prerossiniana’, *Il mondo artistico*, 19 July 1868, 2-3, 2.

⁵⁴ I take Filippi’s use of the term ‘historical’ in Alois Riegl’s sense, according to which ‘Everything that has been and is no longer we call *historical*’: Riegl, ‘The Modern Cult of Monuments: Its Character and Its Origin’, *Oppositions*, 25 (1982), 21-51, 21.

that the composer was still present.⁵⁵ Such sculptures, of course, provided only a surrogate for the recently departed man (who had already been granted a monument by his home town of Pesaro in 1864 and would have several others dedicated to him in subsequent years). Yet they had the advantage of seeming less ephemeral than all-too human flesh.⁵⁶ Rossini nevertheless also came to be depicted, post mortem, as a musical monument. According to critic Francesco d'Arcais, his operas – of which only a few were still regularly performed at the time⁵⁷ – were ‘eternal monuments that time has not managed to destroy, and that now shine more brightly than ever’.⁵⁸ What is more, when Verdi suggested that he and other Italian composers should write a composite Mass to be performed on the first anniversary of Rossini’s death, the idea was immediately welcomed as an ‘artistic monument’, a ‘monumental score’, ‘the most splendid monument that one could raise to Rossini’s memory’.⁵⁹ Well before anyone could guess what it would sound like – the first performance was, as it happened, delayed by more than a century – the composition was added to the lengthening list of musical monuments.⁶⁰ For his part, Verdi seemed reluctant to make monumental claims. Although he did so on more than one occasion, he was quick to add that the Mass would only work as a monument if it adhered to precise conditions: that it should be performed in

⁵⁵ Busts appeared at the Teatro Carcano in Milan, in Trieste and in a church in Genoa; see *GMM*, 22 November 1868, 380, and Carlo Matteo Mossa, ‘Una “Messa” per la storia’, in *Messa per Rossini: la storia, il testo, la musica*, ed. Michele Girardi and Pierluigi Petrobelli (Parma and Milan, 1988), 11-78, here 18. The idea that a composer should attend the premieres or important performances of his operas had still not been completely abandoned, not in Italy at least, and might have played a part in the proliferation of busts when he was not present.

⁵⁶ Andreas Huyssen has argued that a desire for permanence lies at the very heart of the need for the monumental, particularly in the nineteenth century, when an increasing awareness of the ephemeral had been arising; see Andreas Huyssen, ‘Monumental Seduction’, *New German Critique*, 69 (1996), 181-200, esp. 188 and 192.

⁵⁷ See Philip Gossett, ‘Omaggio a (liberazione da) Rossini’, in *Messa per Rossini*, 7-10, here 7-8.

⁵⁸ ‘monumenti eterni che il tempo non valse a distruggere, e che ora risplendono di luce più viva che mai’: Francesco d’Arcais, in *L’opinione*, quoted from *GMM*, 22 November 1868, 379. It is interesting to observe, as Matthew Head has pointed out for the German-speaking countries in an earlier period, how the practice of building memorials to composers developed hand in hand with a new way of thinking about their compositions, with the formation of a long-lasting music canon; see Matthew Head, ‘Music with “No Past”? Archaeologies of Joseph Haydn and *The Creation*’, *19th-Century Music*, 23 (2000), 191-217, esp. 197-8.

⁵⁹ ‘monumento artistico’, ‘spartito monumentale’: *GMM*, 22 November 1868, 379; ‘il più splendido monumento che si potesse erigere alla memoria di Rossini’: *GMM*, 6 December 1868, 399.

⁶⁰ For a thorough account of historical and musical aspects concerning the Mass, see *Messa per Rossini*.

Bologna (Rossini's adopted hometown) on the anniversary of its dedicatee's death, and that immediately afterwards it should be locked away in an archive. In any other circumstances, it would be 'a mere work of art', 'a mere musical concert': an object lacking the sacral aura proper to monuments.⁶¹

The long debates spurred on in the musical press by the Cimarosa performances and the plans for Verdi's Rossini Mass point to something easily overlooked when we address the topic of monumentality: that monuments are less the result of accepted stylistic properties, defining the monumental as an aesthetic category, and more the product of a set of values and beliefs contingent on an historical-cultural context. This shift away from a definition of the monumental in aesthetic (or stylistic) terms towards a more historically-imbued understanding lies among the aims of Alexander Rehding's recent book on the topic. As the author warns early on, musical monumentality is deceptively self-evident: it seems to be entirely encapsulated in bombastic and overwhelming sound effects.⁶² Time and again, Rehding attempts to overthrow this view, lending monumentality a significance that is more tightly bound up with historical processes and attitudes.⁶³ Overall, however, his project remains suspended between, on the one hand, interpretations that draw on the historically contingent and, on the other, a latent attraction to purely aesthetic (and more absolute) accounts. This emerges, for instance, when Rehding defines nineteenth-century monumentality in music as residing between

two distinct types of magnitude: one component, historical greatness, can be summarized under the modern keywords of collective memory and identity formation, while its other component, physical size, shows a marked tendency toward dramatic proportions (or even lack of any proportionality) that would elicit astonishment from its audiences.⁶⁴

⁶¹ 'una semplice opera d'arte', 'un semplice concerto musicale': Verdi, letters to Camillo Casarini (10 November 1869) and Giulio Ricordi (18 November 1869), in *I copialettere di Giuseppe Verdi*, ed. Gaetano Cesari and Alessandro Luzio (Milan, 1913), 217 and 218. For Verdi's wish that the Mass be locked away in an archive, see his proposal published in the *GMM*, 22 November 1868, 379.

⁶² See Alexander Rehding, *Music and Monumentality: Commemoration and Wonderment in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (New York and Oxford, 2009), 3.

⁶³ Rehding draws, for instance, on Nora's concept of 'memory site' (12-13), nineteenth-century historicism and philological interests (Chapter Five) and Wagner's personal views on monuments and monumentality (Chapter Three, esp. 82-4).

⁶⁴ Rehding, *Music and Monumentality*, 27.

This second element, Rehding goes on to explain, is often linked with the feeling of the sublime. Even if we argued, however, that ‘magnitude’ has to do less with monuments’ physical size than with their impact on the audience, such a claim remains problematic: and this because of the absolute terms of our discourse.⁶⁵

The lack of concern shown by nineteenth-century Italians for the sound of the proposed Mass for Rossini, and the distinctly ‘anti-monumental’ character of *Il matrimonio segreto*, confront us with less steady views.⁶⁶ They encourage us to look beyond stylistic and aesthetic qualities when attempting to explain a work’s monumentality. Ultimately, if there *is* a way in which stylistic features play a part in fostering monumental claims, this will only emerge from examination of a work’s relationship to the historical-musical context in which such statements arise. Monuments may aspire to endless life, but they by no means exist in a timeless present.

*...ed arbitro s’assise in mezzo a lor*⁶⁷

Noi crediamo che in questo eclettismo intelligente stia il principale carattere della musica Verdiana – e naturalmente in un’epoca di transizione come la nostra, in questo carattere sta il suo pregio, e la causa prima del grande successo anche del *Don Carlos*.⁶⁸

[We believe that in such intelligent eclecticism resides the principal character of Verdi’s music – and of course in an epoch of transition such as ours, the quality of this music consists in this character, which is also the chief reason for the success of *Don Carlos*.]

As early as March 1867, when *Don Carlos* was first performed at the Paris Opéra, in its French five-act version, Italian journalists reported the responses Verdi’s

⁶⁵ In his review of Rehding’s book, James Garratt makes a similar point, warning against ‘the quest to retain a unified conception of monumentality’: Garratt, review of Alexander Rehding, *Music and Monumentality: Commemoration and Wonderment in Nineteenth-Century Germany*, in *Music & Letters*, 92/3 (2011), 489-92, 491.

⁶⁶ I am aware that one implication of my use of the adjective ‘anti-monumental’ is that all monuments are big. However, I am using this adjective only to suggest that the opposite is the case.

⁶⁷ ‘Ei si nomò: due secoli, / l’un contro l’altro armato, / sommessi a lui si volsero, / come aspettando il fato; / ei fe’ silenzio, ed arbitro / s’assise in mezzo a lor’. It is hard not to think of Verdi when one reads these and other lines from Alessandro Manzoni’s ‘Il cinque maggio’ (1821), repr. in *Tutte le poesie di Alessandro Manzoni*, ed. Arcangelo Leone De Castris (Florence, 1965), 169-72, 171. Manzoni wrote his ode immediately after Napoleon’s death in Saint Helena, an event that deeply struck him and encouraged him to reflect on the passing of time and human glory. In his youth, Verdi composed a setting of this ode; see Phillips-Matz, *Verdi*, 30.

⁶⁸ Fortis, in *Il pungolo*, 27 March 1868, 1.

work aroused in France, as well as, in subsequent months, in Italy and elsewhere. By the time it reached Milan, in March 1868 and in an Italian translation by Achille de Lauzières, the opera was hardly a novelty. It did, however, raise considerable expectations, as well as renewing long-standing disputes between supporters and detractors of Verdi's music. As mentioned earlier, the dominance of the orchestra, the unusual harmonic progressions and the *declamato* writing pointed, for many, to a break with the Italian musical tradition. Some of these arguments would later reappear in connection with the premiere of the revised, four-act opera at La Scala in 1884; but by that time Italian audiences had become acquainted with much of Verdi's 1867 music, including its most innovative aspects, and debate mostly centred around the newly composed pieces.⁶⁹

Of course, disquisitions about the extent to which Verdi had rejected the Italian operatic past had been part of critical writings for several years. Narratives of progress proliferated, and reflected both the nineteenth-century belief in a steady advance in both the arts and science, and the persistence of a Rossinian legacy as the yardstick against which all new Italian operas were to be judged. *Don Carlo*, however, arrived at a special moment. For one thing, the 1860s had been marked by a worrying shortage of new composing talent (none of the new works by Italian composers staged at La Scala between 1861 and 1868 was successful).⁷⁰ For another, Verdi's pace of composition after the 1850s had slowed consistently, and his only two new operas in the 1860s had been written for foreign theatres.⁷¹ To make matters worse, as early as a few years after the achievement of a single geopolitical identity, Italy (as well as its theatrical system) experienced serious financial difficulties; images of crisis and decadence were indeed omnipresent in writings of the period.⁷² In the circumstances, and owing to Verdi's half-new, half-

⁶⁹ The premiere took place on 10 January 1884. The opera had last been performed at La Scala in the 1878-79 carnival season.

⁷⁰ See Carlos del Cueto, 'The Death of Italian Opera', *Opera*, 62/5 (2011), 510-18, esp. 510 and 512.

⁷¹ *Don Carlos* for the Paris Opéra and *La forza del destino* (1862) for the Imperial Theatre of St Petersburg.

⁷² One of the consequences of these difficulties was the shift from the central to the municipal management of the theatres. On the Milan case, see Irene Piazzoni, 'La cessione dei teatri demaniali ai comuni: il caso di Milano (1860-1872)', *Storia in Lombardia*, 13/1 (1994), 5-72. Carlos del Cueto has referred to the 1860s as the decade of the 'death' of Italian opera; see del Cueto, 'The Death of Italian Opera', *Opera*, 62/5 (2011), 510-18. For later-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century

old musical language, *Don Carlo* awakened feelings of ambivalence: that it lay at the boundary between the ‘old’ and the ‘new’; that it marked both the end and the beginning of a musical era.⁷³ What is more, the opera’s oscillation between two temporal dimensions matched contemporary perceptions of Verdi in general as a composer whose exact position in the history of nineteenth-century Italian music was increasingly problematic. While most of his pre-*Rigoletto* operas were becoming old-fashioned and would soon fall out of the repertory, his latest compositions increasingly showed foreign (read: ‘futuristic’) influences. As one critic put it, Verdi was ‘that colossus who represents the link between a great past and a greater future’; in the words of another, he was the ‘arbiter between two centuries, between two schools, between two peoples’.⁷⁴

Verdi’s use of a novel musical language, one that led some critics to describe *Don Carlo* in terms of ‘eclecticism’, was thus a feature of the opera that could easily encourage comparisons with the contemporary historical and music-historical moment.⁷⁵ Although such a miscellany of forms and styles did not always appeal to the critics, it was praised on occasion, and this because it appeared to match well the current self-image of Italy and Italian music: both were suspended between an increasingly awe-inspiring past and an enticing if still uncertain future. In an article (quoted earlier) published in *Il pungolo* a few days after the Milan premiere, Leone Fortis went so far as to argue that Verdi’s eclecticism was, in an ‘epoch of transition’, the main reason for the success of *Don Carlo*. More interesting still, it was not only the combination of conventional numbers and innovative pieces that stimulated attempts to read Verdi’s opera in connection with contemporaneous circumstances; it was also the most modern aspects of the score,

operatic discourse underpinned by tropes of disease and degeneracy, see Alexandra Wilson, ‘Torrefranca vs. Puccini: Embodying a Decadent Italy’, *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 13/1 (2001), 29-53.

⁷³ Del Cueto makes a similar point; see his ‘Opera in 1860s Milan’, 185.

⁷⁴ ‘quel colosso che è anello fra un grande passato ed un più grande avvenire’: Sangiorgi, in *Monitore di Bologna*, 28 October 1867, quoted from *Le opere di Giuseppe Verdi a Bologna*, 157; ‘arbitro fra due secoli, fra due scuole, fra due genti’: Corinno Mariotti, in *GMM*, 29 December 1867, 410.

⁷⁵ For other reviews underlining the variety of styles characterising Verdi’s opera, see Filippi, in *La perseveranza*, article reprinted in *GMM*, 10 November 1867, 353-6, esp. 354; and Filippi, ‘Studio analitico sul *Don Carlo* di Giuseppe Verdi (I),’ esp. 34-5.

taken by themselves, that occasionally received interpretative attention linking them to that wider scene.

One of the most unconventional pieces of the 1867, five-act *Don Carlo* was the Grand Inquisitor scene in Act 4. Verdi's attachment to this number, which is characterised by unpredictable musical flow, extensive use of declamation and rich orchestral colours, is well known. The confrontation between Philip II of Spain, and the blind ninety-year-old priest, symbol of the repressive power of the Inquisition, was one of two scenes from Friedrich Schiller's play that Verdi had specifically asked to be included, and this at a very early stage of correspondence with his librettists.⁷⁶ It is to say the least thought-provoking that the two scenes, the second being the duet for Philip and Posa in Act 2, would have very different compositional histories: one (the Inquisitor scene) remained unchanged throughout all versions of the opera; the other (the Philip-Posa duet) underwent the most repeated and thorough-going revision of any part of the score. On various occasions after the opera's premiere, Verdi's special concern for the Philip-Inquisitor duet emerged, a sign that he was aware of the piece's groundbreaking qualities and of its mixed reception by the audiences. In 1869, in a letter to Giulio Ricordi, he lamented:

Così nel D. Carlos sento sempre parlare di qualche Duetto, dell'aria del V atto, ma giammai del Terz'atto che è veramente il punto culminante, e, dirò così il cuore del Dramma; né mai della scena dell'Inquisizione che si eleva di qualche poco sugli altri pezzi.⁷⁷

[In D. Carlos I always hear talk of some duets or the aria in Act V, but never of the third act, which is the climax and, I would say, the heart of the drama; nor ever of the Inquisitor's scene, which is elevated somewhat above the other pieces.]

A good thirty years later, in June 1900, he continued to regard the duet as especially significant, preparing a vocal-score reduction of its opening fourteen bars for display at Paris's Exposition Universelle.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ See Verdi's letter to Emile Perrin (21 July 1865), in Günther, 'La Genèse de *Don Carlos*' (1972), 30.

⁷⁷ Verdi's letter to Giulio Ricordi (7 August 1869), quoted from *Giuseppe Verdi: autobiografia dalle lettere*, ed. Aldo Oberdorfer (Milan, 2006), 469, fn. 19; English translation quoted from Martin Chusid, 'The Inquisitor's Scene in Verdi's *Don Carlos*: Thoughts on the Drama, Libretto, and Music', in *Studies in Musical Sources and Style: Essays in Honor of Jan LaRue*, ed. Eugene K. Wolf and Edward H. Roesner (Madison, 1990), 505-34, 505. Verdi's concern for the duet was also described by some nineteenth-century observers: 'Sappiamo però che Verdi ci tiene moltissimo – ed a ragione – e che non si stancò mai di raccomandare la esecuzione di questo duetto': Fortis, in *Il pungolo*, 28 March 1868, 1.

Verdi cannot, however, have been entirely sincere when in 1869 he complained that Act 3 ('the heart of the drama') and the Inquisitor scene were never discussed. In fact, the Act-3 finale and the Philip-Inquisitor confrontation were precisely the moments that had thus far most attracted critical attention. With regard to the duet, comments were not always positive, yet the novelty of Verdi's language was repeatedly remarked upon. After the Paris premiere, Filippi, writing for *La perseveranza*, observed:

L'indeterminatezza delle forme è tale, il dramma è così rigorosamente espresso, la parola seguita con tanto acume di filosofia, che l'*aria* di Filippo II e il *duetto* così detto dell'inquisizione, si possono chiamare *aria* e *duetto* niente altro che per modo di dire...⁷⁹

[The indeterminacy of form is such, the drama is so rigorously expressed, the word is followed with so much philosophical acumen that Philip's *aria* and the so-called inquisition *duet* can be called *aria* and *duet* only by name...]

Commenting again on the duet in his 'Studio analitico sul *Don Carlos* di Giuseppe Verdi' (published in Ricordi's *Gazzetta musicale di Milano* in several instalments between January 1869 and July 1871), Filippi voiced his astonishment more clearly:⁸⁰

Appena il conte di Lerma ha annunziato l'arrivo del Grande Inquisitore, dai primi accordi dell'orchestra si capisce che si ha da fare con una musica nuova, piena di sensi reconditi e fatali [...] i suoni dell'orchestra escono dalla sue [dell'Inquisitore] viscere, le più profonde [...] questo passo [...] è il lugubre ritornello di tutto il duetto, ma con passaggi ed accordi variatissimi, sopra un movimento ritmico insistente [...] e così finisce lo stupendo duetto che il pubblico non può gustare subito, ma che diviene con parecchie udizioni una delle cose più interessanti, più belle, più filosofiche dello spartito.⁸¹

⁷⁸ See Chusid, 'The Inquisitor's Scene', 528-30. For other occasions on which Verdi recalled this scene, see his letter to Cesare De Sanctis (22 March 1871), in *Giuseppe Verdi: autobiografia dalle lettere*, 466-7; and his letter to Giulio Ricordi (18 May 1883), in *Carteggio Verdi-Ricordi: 1882-1885*, ed. Franca Cella, Madina Ricordi and Marisa di Gregorio Casati (Parma, 1994), 109-10. For further details on the 1900 excerpt, and for a study of the reception of the Inquisitor scene and *Don Carlos* in connection with listening practices in Paris in the 1860s, see Flora Willson's 'Of Time and the City: Verdi's *Don Carlos* and its Parisian Critics', *19th-Century Music* (forthcoming, 2014). My thanks to Dr Willson for sharing an early version of this article with me.

⁷⁹ Filippi, 'Lettere parigine (I): *D. Carlos* di Verdi', *La perseveranza*, 19 March 1867, 1-2, 2.

⁸⁰ Filippo Filippi, 'Studio analitico sul *Don Carlos* di Giuseppe Verdi', *Gazzetta musicale di Milano*, 17 and 31 January; 14 and 21 February; 14 March; 27 June; 11 and 25 July; 9, 15 and 22 August; 5 and 19 September 1869; 6 and 20 March; 1 May 1870; and 30 July 1871. The innovative character of Filippi's study resides in its being one of the earliest Italian attempts, apart from Abramo Basevi's *Studio sulle opere di Giuseppe Verdi* (Florence, 1859), at a close reading of a music score.

⁸¹ Filippi, 'Studio analitico sul *Don Carlos* di Giuseppe Verdi (VII)', *GMM*, 19 September 1869, 327-30, 328-30.

[As soon as the count of Lerma has announced the arrival of the Grand Inquisitor, from the first orchestral chords we realise that we are dealing with a new type of music, full of hidden, tragic meaning [...] the sounds of the orchestra come from the depths of his [the Inquisitor's] viscera [...] this passage [...] is the gloomy ritornello of the whole duet, but with very different passages and chords, over an insistent rhythmic movement [...] and so ends this wonderful duet, which the audience cannot appreciate immediately, but which becomes after repeated listening one of the most interesting, most beautiful, most philosophical moments of the opera.]

Other critics also wondered at the unheard-of qualities of this music, particularly the recitative-like passages for the voices, which most differentiated Verdi's piece from the Italian, 'melodic' tradition.⁸² The strikingly powerful musical battle between the two symbolical figures, standing for the powers of State and Church, became thus caught up in the Italian discussions about *la musica dell'avvenire*, serving as the stage for further confrontations. Indeed, finding an exact position within the current musical scene for this peculiar piece – termed a 'scène' by Verdi in his autograph score and often called a 'dramatic dialogue' by nineteenth-century critics – turned out to be a matter of real importance.⁸³

A few days after the La Scala premiere, the music critic for the *Gazzetta di Milano*, 'F. F.', entered into a debate with the reviewer for *Il pungolo*, Fortis.⁸⁴ The latter had expressed his views on *Don Carlo* in three articles which, despite overall praise for Verdi's work, criticised the excessively conventional character of some pieces.⁸⁵ 'F. F.', clearly overstating his colleague's assertions, summarised by saying that Fortis was encouraging Verdi 'to write an opera entirely on the model of that duet between Philip II and the Grand Inquisitor, which is, we repeat, the

⁸² Among the most interesting reviews, besides Filippi's, are those in the *Gazzetta di Milano* (26 and 31 March 1868), *Il pungolo* (27 and 28 March 1868) and the *Gazzetta di Venezia* (reprinted in 'Supplemento alla GMM', 21 March 1869). For some French reviews, see *Paris-Magazine* (17 March 1867), *Le Moniteur universel* (18 March 1867) and *La Gazette de France* (19 March 1867), all in *Giuseppe Verdi, Don Carlos: Dossier*.

⁸³ Printed sources, on the other hand, usually defined it a 'scène et duo' or 'duetto'; see Gilles de Van, *Verdi's Theatre: Creating Drama through Music* (Chicago and London, 1998), 275.

⁸⁴ 'F. F.' was also the signature to an article about the *musica dell'avvenire* in *Gazzetta di Milano*, 19 March 1868, 1-2. Rosita Tordi suggests that Giuseppe Rovani, co-owner of the *Gazzetta* and opponent of Wagner and his school, was the commissioner of both articles (which were certainly not by Filippi); see Rosita Tordi, *Il manto di Lindoro: Rovani e il teatro d'opera* (Rome, 1995), 65-70.

⁸⁵ Fortis, in *Il pungolo*, 26, 27 and 28 March 1868.

most complete indictment of the *wagnerian-mefistofelian* system'.⁸⁶ We understand from the rest of the article that 'F. F.' was neither completely in favour of nor totally against Verdi's opera, in this sense following most of his colleagues. In general, he thought Verdi had been influenced too much by Meyerbeer, and that his individual character – his Italian melodies – were clearest in some of his earlier works. What is most striking, though, is that 'F. F.' went on to define the Inquisitor's scene in the following terms: 'That duet is a miracle of art, but it is the *ne plus ultra* of indeterminate recitative, of *melopoeia* without rhythm'.⁸⁷ *Nec plus ultra*: 'not further beyond'. This was the supposed inscription on the Pillars of Hercules, marking the end of the known world. It was a warning for sailors, a limit for navigation. In its more common meaning, however, the expression indicates perfection, the outer limit of what can be achieved. It even has an exemplary value, in some ways similar to that of the 'classic'. It is perhaps significant that the same critic, in an article published only a few days earlier, describes the Philip-Inquisitor duet in precisely such terms:

quel pezzo di musica senza melodia ritmica, dove la linea melodica segue inflessibilmente la parola con una brevità classica [...] è insieme una gloriosa vittoria conseguita da Verdi costretto a rinnegare la spontaneità del suo ingegno per far della melopea, e la disfatta dei musicisti dell'avvenire; nessuno della scuola antimelodica e antiritmica arriverà certo a far cosa più classicamente indiscutibile...⁸⁸

[that piece of music with no rhythmic melody, where the melodic line follows closely the words with classic brevity [...] is both a glorious victory achieved by Verdi, who has been obliged to renounce the spontaneity of his genius in order to write melopoeia, and the defeat of the musicians of the future; nobody among those who form part of the antimelodic and antirhythmic school will ever be able to write music more unquestionably classic than this...]

Tellingly, 'F. F.' placed Verdi's distinctly unconventional music for the Inquisitor scene in between the old Verdi (the Italian tradition) and *la musica dell'avvenire*.

⁸⁶ 'a scrivere oramai tutta un'opera sul modello di quel duetto fra Filippo II e il Grande Inquisitore, che è, lo ripetiamo, la più completa condanna del sistema *wagneriano-mefistofelico*': 'F. F.', in *Gazzetta di Milano*, 31 March 1868, 2.

⁸⁷ 'Quel duetto è un miracolo di arte, ma è il *nec plus ultra* a cui può giungere il recitativo indeterminato, la *melopea* senza misura ritmica': 'F. F.', in *Gazzetta di Milano*, 31 March 1868, 2. During the 1860s, the term *melopea* was of common use in Italy and stood for a melody lacking well-defined rhythmic qualities (which were thought to characterise Italian melodies). *Melopea* generally identified with the melodies of Wagner and the school of the future; see Virgilio Bernardoni, 'La teoria delle melodia vocale nella trattatistica italiana: 1790-1870', *Acta Musicologica*, 62/1 (1990), 29-61, esp. 57-61.

⁸⁸ 'F. F.', in *Gazzetta di Milano*, 26 March 1868, 2.

In this sense, the critic's attempt to 'classicise' what often seemed unpromising melodies, ones that lacked any truly melodic quality, may well speak of a desire to exorcise the Otherness of Verdi's new, speech-like vocal writing – by camouflaging it in a more acceptable, reassuringly classic disguise. At the least, his stance betrays the extent to which Verdi's scene was politicised in the Italian musical debates: it was seen as a vehicle for solving pressing problems, for reconciling opposite poles. What is more, the duet's unquestionable modernity, albeit disquieting, was beguiling enough for some to propose the piece as no less than a model for future Italian music.⁸⁹

Restoration works

When it came to revising *Don Carlo* in the early 1880s, Verdi himself must have thought that the time was ripe for taking the Philip-Grand Inquisitor scene as a model for that other political 'dramatic dialogue' in the score: the Philip-Posa duet of Act 1 (Act 2 in the original, five-act edition). This piece had already given Verdi remarkable difficulty over the past fifteen years. As is well known, it was one of only two numbers he felt compelled to readjust, with the help of *Aida* librettist Antonio Ghislanzoni, when he produced a revised edition of the score for performances in Naples in 1872. The crucial changes to the scene, however, were those made in 1882-83, and would result in substantially refashioned music. After the discarding of the original lyrical movements, the piece now recalled the free declamation that characterised the (never modified) scene for Philip and the Inquisitor.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ While modernity rebels against tradition, it also establishes its own tradition: what is 'new' (that is, not merely stylish) today will one day become antiquity, a classic; see Charles Baudelaire, 'The Painter of Modern Life' (1863), repr. in *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, ed. and trans. Jonathan Mayne (New York, 1964), 1-40, here 13-14; and Jürgen Habermas, 'Modernity versus Postmodernity', *New German Critique*, 22 (1981), 3-14, here 4.

⁹⁰ On the various revisions of the duet, see in particular David Rosen, 'Le quattro stesure del duetto Filippo-Posa', in *Atti del II° congresso internazionale di studi verdiani*, ed. Marcello Pavarani (Parma, 1971), 368-88; Budden, *From Don Carlos to Falstaff*, 80-98; and Roger Parker, 'Philippe and Posa Act II: The Shock of the New', *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 14/1-2 (2002), 133-47. Most of Verdi's correspondence concerning the duet at the time of its last revision in the early 1880s is reproduced in Ursula Günther and Gabriella Carrara Verdi, 'Der Briefwechsel Verdi-Nutter-Du Locle zur Revision des *Don Carlos*', *Analecta musicologica*, 15 (1975), 334-401.

Don Carlo was of course not the first opera Verdi decided to revise at a later point. Its 'restoration' followed at least four similar undertakings: those to *Macbeth* (1847; revised version premiered in 1865), *Stiffelio* (1850; as *Aroldo*, 1857), *La forza del destino* (1862 and 1869) and *Simon Boccanegra*. Such revisions, which usually resulted in the heightening of stylistic disparity already at the heart of the original works, were conceived by Verdi at least partly as a response to changing musical tastes: they constitute evidence of how the original operas were received, and point to Verdi's unceasing (if often unacknowledged) attention to both critics' and audiences' reactions. By 'updating' some of the music, particularly the most old-fashioned elements, Verdi hoped to provide a new version of a given opera more suited to modern tastes.⁹¹ What is most remarkable, starting at least with the late-1860s revision of *La forza del destino*, such remakings took place at a time when Verdi, in his epistolary statements, was increasingly adopting conservative positions about how Italian music should develop. He himself, that is, entered the contemporary debates in which some recent and less recent operas were – for different reasons and to different ends – being described as monuments. Verdi's positions have far too often been smoothly summarised under his motto 'torniamo all'antico, e sarà un progresso' ('let's return to the past, it will be a step forward').⁹² In fact, the composer's late operas and revisions, as well as his correspondence, suggest his attitudes to the *musica dell'avvenire* and to the particular path young Italian composers should follow were more complex.

Throughout the 1860s, both the daily and the musical press in Milan were animated by diatribes about musical and aesthetic problems by a group of artists, some of them with impressive musical credentials, known as the *scapigliati* ('the dishevelled ones').⁹³ The intensity of debate about new operas by young Italian

⁹¹ Roger Parker has explored some of the implications of Verdi's late revisions in his 'Philippe and Posa Act II' and in Chapter Four of his *Leonora's Last Act: Essays in Verdian Discourse* (Princeton, 1997). On a completely different type of revision, which applied to most of Verdi's early operas, see David Lawton and David Rosen, 'Verdi's Non-Definitive Revisions: The Early Operas', in *Atti del III° congresso internazionale di studi verdiani*, 189-237.

⁹² Verdi's letter to Francesco Florimo (5 January 1871), in *I copialettere*, 233.

⁹³ For an introduction to the *scapigliatura*, see Giuseppe Farinelli, *Scapigliatura: profilo storico, protagonisti, documenti* (Rome, 2003) and the much longer, classic account of Gaetano Mariani, *Storia della Scapigliatura* (Caltanissetta and Rome, 1967). On music and the *scapigliatura*, see Guido Salvetti, 'La Scapigliatura milanese e il teatro d'opera', in *Il melodramma italiano*

artists (Boito's *Mefistofele*), the latest works of Italy's most famous composer (Verdi's *Don Carlo* and his revised *La forza del destino*) and recent compositions by foreign musicians (Meyerbeer's *L'africana* and Gounod's *Romeo e Giulietta*) was to some extent the result of the *scapigliati*'s intellectualism.⁹⁴ On several occasions Verdi disapproved of their abstruse theorising, lamenting their waffling about such concepts as Art, Aesthetics, Past and Future.⁹⁵ Still, starting in the late 1860s and continuing for the next two decades, he occasionally put aside his distaste for such questions and commented, often in contradictory terms, on the future of Italian music. In December 1867 he depicted the role of the artist in a quasi-prophetic manner:

l'artista deve scrutar nel futuro, veder nel caos nuovi mondi; e se nella nuova strada vede in fondo in fondo il *luminico*, non lo spaventi il buio che l'attornia: cammini, e se qualche volta inciampa e cade, s'alzi e tiri diritto sempre.⁹⁶

[the artist must peer into the future, see new worlds in the chaos; and if on the new path, at its very end, he sees a *feeble light*, he should not be intimidated by the dark that enshrouds it: he should walk on, and if sometimes he stumbles and falls, he should get up and move ever onwards.]

Similarly, in a letter to his friend and senator-to-be Giuseppe Piroli, in May of the following year, he went so far as to list the steps modern composers had made in detaching themselves from the early nineteenth-century tradition.⁹⁷ And yet, only three years later, writing to Francesco Florimo, he would voice his famous call for a return to 'the past': to *l'antico*.

But what did Verdi mean by *l'antico*? And how might this relate to the debates about musical taste and monuments that emerged at the time? Much has been made of Verdi's motto since its appearance. Verdi, in the process of declining an invitation to be director of the Naples conservatory, originally used the phrase as part of his advice on how to improve music education in Italy. He recommended

dell'Ottocento: studi e ricerche per Massimo Mila, ed. Giorgio Pestelli (Turin, 1977), 567-604, and David Kimbell, *Italian Opera* (Cambridge, 1995), esp. 569-95.

⁹⁴ The revised *La forza del destino* was first performed at La Scala in February 1869; *L'africana* and *Romeo e Giulietta* premiered there in March 1866 and December 1867.

⁹⁵ See Verdi's letter to Clara Maffei (13 December 1863), in *Giuseppe Verdi: autobiografia dalle lettere*, 420-2.

⁹⁶ Verdi's letter to Vincenzo Torelli (23 December 1867), in *I copialettere*, 619.

⁹⁷ See Verdi's letter to Giuseppe Piroli (30 May 1868), in Gustavo Marchesi, 'Gli anni della *Forza del destino*', *Verdi: bollettino dell'ISV*, 2/6 (1966), 1505-42, here 1523.

rigorous study of the old Italian masters (particularly Palestrina and his contemporaries), and little exposure to modern music. The danger of seeing modern operas, he argued, was that one could be charmed ‘by their many harmonic and orchestral beauties’ – ‘beauties’ that, interestingly enough, had been one of the hot topics of the debates around Verdi’s latest works (*Don Carlo* in particular). Instead, students should focus on fugue and counterpoint, only afterwards composing their own music. This would save them from the risk of joining ‘the crowd of imitators’ – another accusation that had recently been made against Verdi himself.⁹⁸ The letter – as Verdi must have expected – was soon published in newspapers and musical magazines, giving the motto its substantial notoriety in subsequent years.⁹⁹ What is most interesting, Verdi’s austere advice was retrospectively loaded with alternative meanings, ones that do not always seem to reflect the original (admittedly ambiguous) sense. ‘Torniamo all’antico’ came to represent as much an exhortation for students to practise Palestrinian counterpoint as a rallying cry for those wishing to return to ‘truly Italian’ music (i.e., Rossini);¹⁰⁰ as much a call for the rediscovery of the art of *bel canto* as a case for support, at the turn of the century, for the early music movement.¹⁰¹ Put differently, Verdi’s motto became weighed down with its own historical baggage.

Common to all these appropriations of Verdi’s statement is an attempt to foster the idea of a nationalist revival of Italian music. What is rarely cited, though, is that Verdi makes another, equally arresting statement in that same letter to

⁹⁸ ‘dalle molte bellezze armoniche ed istromentali’, ‘turba degli imitatori’: Verdi’s letter to Florimo (5 January 1871), 233. The accusation was often heard, both in France and in Italy, at the time of the first performances of *Don Carlo*.

⁹⁹ The letter, published in *Il pungolo* (Naples) on 17 January 1871, was reprinted in the *GMM*, 22 January 1871, 35.

¹⁰⁰ See ‘Rassegna musicale’, *Nuova antologia di scienze, lettere ed arti*, 30/12 (1875), 876-86, here 877, and 34/8 (1877), 970-9, here 979. Interestingly, both articles are signed by G[irolamo] A[lessandro] Biaggi.

¹⁰¹ Laura Basini lists these among the meanings attached to the motto in various sets of late nineteenth-century writings on music; see Basini, ‘Verdi and Sacred Revivalism in Post Unification Italy’, *19th-Century Music*, 28/2 (2004), 133-59, esp. 145-7. For further examples of the use of the motto, see Filippi’s reviews of *Simon Boccanegra* and *Don Carlo*, in *La perseveranza*, 25 March 1881 and 14 January 1884, reproduced respectively in *Verdi’s Otello and Simon Boccanegra (Revised Version) in Letters and Documents*, ed. and trans. Hans Busch, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1988), II, 666-72, here 669, and *Carteggio Verdi-Ricordi: 1882-1885*, 405-9, here 408. Filippi sees Verdi’s instruction exemplified in the brief ‘benediction’ (the ‘Sostenuto religioso’) of the Gabriele-Fiesco duet of Act 1 of the new *Boccanegra*, and in the new prelude to Act 2 of the revised *Don Carlo*.

Florimo about *l'antico*: 'I would have liked, so to speak, to put one foot in the past [*passato*], and the other in the present and the future, since I am not afraid of the *music of the future*'.¹⁰² True, the expression *musica dell'avvenire* may not on that occasion have referred exclusively to foreign music; it may not have been at odds with the revival of the Italian musical tradition, which Verdi seemed to be supporting. Yet this and other elements – Verdi's invitation to study 'modern declamation';¹⁰³ his warning to young composers of the perils he himself had experienced and had cost him hurtful denunciations; his far from simple views on Wagner; the increasingly modern aspects of his late music – could at least invite reconsideration of what *l'antico* meant to him. Perhaps they could even lead us towards a more nuanced, more open-ended understanding of the older Verdi's call for a 'return to the past', and of his attitudes to 'modern' music. These are broad matters, some of which I shall return to in Chapter Three. I should like, however, to consider briefly one possible resonance for Verdi of *l'antico* and try to apply it, if in a loose, non-prescriptive way, to the issue of the composer's late operatic revisions. This will eventually take me full circle back to the topic of monumentality.

'Dunque, né *passato* né *avvenire*!' ('So, neither the *past* nor the *future*!'), Verdi exclaimed in 1883, writing to Giulio Ricordi. This may sound like a renewed claim to appoint himself the long-awaited link that would connect the past with the future of Italian music: a new colossus of Rhodes, perhaps, with one leg on each side of the harbour of music's present. Verdi nevertheless went on to explain:

È vero che io ho detto: 'Torniamo all'antico', ma io intendo l'antico, che è base, fondamento, solidità; io intendo quell'antico che è stato messo da parte dalle esuberanze moderne, ed a cui si dovrà ritornare presto o tardi infallibilmente. Per ora lasciamo che il torrente straripi. Gli argini si faranno dopo.¹⁰⁴

[It is true that I said: 'Let's return to the past', but I mean the past that is groundwork, foundation, solidity; I mean that past which has been put on one side by modern exuberance, and to which we must inevitably return sooner or later. For now let's allow the river to overflow. We will build the banks later.]

¹⁰² 'Avrei voluto, per così dire, porre un piede sul passato, e l'altro sul presente, e sull'avvenire, ché a me non fa paura la *musica dell'avvenire*': Verdi's letter to Florimo (5 January 1871), 232.

¹⁰³ Verdi's letter to Florimo (5 January 1871), 233.

¹⁰⁴ Verdi's letter to Giulio Ricordi (26 December 1883), in *I copialettere*, 629.

Here *l'antico*, which Verdi distinguishes from *il passato*, seems to indicate no musical past, no specific repertory or tradition. The attributes through which he describes it – ‘groundwork, foundation, solidity’ – could hardly be more generic. All of these words nevertheless confer an element of permanence and stability: far from serving as an historically descriptive concept, *l'antico* seems to suggest a suspension of all historical referents, the superseding of the contingent, the transitory, by means of the timeless. Perhaps it expressed a personal need, all too understandable in the aging Verdi, to stop what cannot be stopped – the inexorable passing of time.

Verdi's letter to Ricordi, which dates from only a few days before the La Scala premiere of the revised *Don Carlo*, may invite further thinking about the increasingly solid position that Verdi, both as opera composer and as a national figure, had gained with Italian audiences. In the last decades of his life, he was fully aware of his status as both a musical and a national ‘monument’, one that would almost certainly survive many years and thus have an effect on future generations. The active role he took in building his public image is proof of this, as is the ‘operatic’, elevated tone of some of his letters. There is a sense, then, in which Verdi's mature revisions could also be read in this light: as an attempt to monumentalise some of his most innovative music, to bestow an abiding status on operas that, in the new repertory-based musical culture, he felt were going to last.¹⁰⁵ Verdi's continual preoccupation with the Philip-Posa duet, and his persistent emphasis on the Inquisitor scene, point to the fact that he was aware of the novelty of these pieces. What is more, by treating these political conversations with such care, he was also making a point about opera as a genre: about what aspects of human life could be encompassed within the operatic realm.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ As it happens, *Don Carlo* fell out of the repertory in Italy as elsewhere in the late nineteenth century, and was rarely staged until at least the second decade of the twentieth century; for a brief performance history, see Giorgio Gualerzi, ‘Un secolo di *Don Carlo*’, in *Atti del II° congresso internazionale di studi verdiani*, 494-504.

¹⁰⁶ The ‘unoperatic’ (insofar as political) quality of these pieces was also remarked upon by some nineteenth-century commentators. In France, Théophile Gautier stated that ‘cette conversation politique et religieuse n'était pas aisée à mettre en musique, mais Verdi s'en est tiré magistralement’: *Le Moniteur universel*, 18 March 1867, quoted from *Giuseppe Verdi, Don Carlos: Dossier*, 105. Fortis claimed that in Philip and the Inquisitor one could see synthesised ‘due principi da secoli in lotta, l'Altare e il Trono, quell'atmosfera storica e morale, che la musica soltanto può rendere’: in *Il pungolo*, 28 March 1868, 1. The Philip-Posa duet was described as being ‘di un

We have, in all this, encountered one further implication of the concept of the ‘monumental’: the idea of durability and permanence. Modulation to this key might seem to lead away from the core idea of this chapter. I have suggested that, if in late 1860s Italy Verdi’s *Don Carlo* was labelled as a monument, it was mainly because it was perceived as poised between the past and the future – and doing so during an historical moment that was as intrigued about these categories as it was uncertain about where to situate itself within the space opening up between them. In other words, the monumental status of Verdi’s opera was tied to the work’s very modernity: to its ‘self-consuming actuality’, in Jürgen Habermas’ definition; to its resonances with perceptions of time that were widespread in Italy at that period.¹⁰⁷ The infiltration of the idea of permanence – an idea we can hardly ignore when addressing the topic of monuments – does not, after all, cast any shadow on this point. And this not only because a monument’s aspiration to everlasting life cannot, for better or worse, always be fulfilled; but also because, to borrow one of Frank Kermode’s thoughts on the ‘classic’, it is all ‘a question of how the works of the past may retain identity in change’; how the model, be it one we call ‘classic’ or ‘monumental’, renews itself from one generation to the next by constantly remoulding its meaning – by, time and again, being made modern.¹⁰⁸

Robert Musil once suggested that ‘there is nothing in this world as invisible as a monument’.¹⁰⁹ Relentless presence, that is, brings about concealment. But to those who allow themselves a few seconds to look up, monuments can renew their narrative function. At the least, they can remind us of ‘the value of time’.¹¹⁰ The aging Verdi may not always have welcomed the honours his contemporaries

genere affatto nuovo; è la politica trasportata nel campo della musica’: *Gazzetta di Venezia*, 12 March 1869, reprinted in ‘Supplemento alla *GMM*’, 21 March 1869, 3. See also Budden, *From Don Carlos to Falstaff*, 16.

¹⁰⁷ Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, 8. Of course, this emphasis on the present, on the contingent had already been indicated as a feature of modern art by Baudelaire in his ‘The Painter of Modern Life’; see Matei Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism* (Durham, NC, 1987), 46-58.

¹⁰⁸ Frank Kermode, *The Classic: Literary Images of Permanence and Change* (Cambridge, MA, and London, 1983), 16.

¹⁰⁹ Robert Musil, ‘Monuments’, in Musil, *Posthumous Papers of a Living Author*, trans. Peter Wortsman (Hygiene, 1987), 61-4, 61.

¹¹⁰ ‘il valore del tempo’: Verdi’s letter to Arrigo Boito (29 March 1862), quoted from *The Verdi-Boito Correspondence*, ed. Marcello Conati and Mario Medici, trans. William Weaver (Chicago and London, 1994), xiii.

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conferred on him through imperishable objects made of marble and stone; it was not by such means that he wished to defy the laws of nature. He did, though, take great pains in updating some of his greatest music in order to save it from oblivion. Perhaps he was answering his operatic monuments' call not to forget. In the words of Verdi's last collaborator, Arrigo Boito, no matter how worn and dated a monument becomes,

Pur colle rotte braccia
quel torso ancor m'allaccia,
e al secolo che raglia
sembra cercar battaglia.¹¹¹

[Even though with broken arms, / that bust still enmeshes me, / and seems to seek battle / with the braying century.]

¹¹¹ Arrigo Boito, 'Un torso' (1862), in Boito, *Tutti gli scritti*, 15-8, 15.

CHAPTER THREE

Bridging Divides:

Verdi's *Requiem* and 'Italian Music'

La musica, come la donna, è così santa d'avvenire e di purificazione, che gli uomini, anche solcandola di prostituzione, non possono cancellar tutta intera l'iride di promessa che la incorona.¹

Giuseppe Mazzini, 1836

Vi sono delle nature virtuosissime, che hanno bisogno di credere in Dio; altre, ugualmente perfette, che sono felici non credendo a niente ed osservando solo rigorosamente, ogni precetto di severa moralità: Manzoni, e Verdi!... Questi due uomini mi fanno pensare, sono per me un vero soggetto di meditazione. Ma le mie imperfezioni e la mia ignoranza, mi rendono incapace di sciogliere l'oscuro problema.²

Giuseppina Strepponi, 1872

On 22 May 1874, the first anniversary of Alessandro Manzoni's death, a small army of local citizens along with countless Italian and foreign visitors gathered – tickets in hand – in the nave of the San Marco church in Milan to attend a distinctly unorthodox ceremony: the celebration of a *missa secca* (that is, a Mass without the consecration of bread and wine) for the soul of Italy's most famous literary figure. The event featured the world premiere of Verdi's *Messa da Requiem* and was widely reported in both the Italian and the international press (see Figure 3.1).³ It

¹ 'Music, like a woman, is so holy with anticipation and purification, that even when men sully it with prostitution, they cannot totally obliterate the aura of promise that crowns it': Giuseppe Mazzini, *Filosofia della musica* (1836), rept. in *Filosofia della musica, e estetica musicale del primo Ottocento*, ed. Marcello de Angelis (Florence, 1977), 33-77, 48; English translation from *Source Readings in Music History*, ed. Oliver Strunk, rev. ed. Leo Treitler (New York and London, 1998), 1085-94, 1085.

² 'There are men with a very virtuous nature who need to believe in God; others, whose nature is equally perfect, that are happy without believing in anything and only following rigorously every precept of severe morality: Manzoni, and Verdi!... These two men make me think; they constitute for me a real subject of meditation. But my imperfections and my ignorance do not allow me to resolve this obscure question': Giuseppina Strepponi, letter to Clara Maffei (7 September 1872), in *Quartetto milanese ottocentesco*, ed. Arturo di Ascoli (Rome, 1974), 282.

³ See David Rosen, *Verdi: 'Requiem'* (Cambridge, 1995), 11. Following the San Marco premiere, the *Messa da Requiem per l'anniversario della morte di Alessandro Manzoni 22 maggio 1874* was performed three times at La Scala (on 25, 27 and 29 May), the first conducted by Verdi, the others

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was almost entirely the artistic solemnity, as opposed to the liturgical function, that attracted interest in the press. Verdi's work, which marked the composer's first public step in sacred composition and followed the success of *Aida* in 1871, was hailed in his homeland as 'a new triumph for Italian art', 'the most important



Figure 3.1: 'La prima esecuzione della Messa di Verdi nella Chiesa di San Marco', drawing by Pessina, *L'illustrazione universale*, 14 June 1874, 20.

by Franco Faccio. The soloists were Teresa Stolz, Maria Waldmann, Giuseppe Capponi and Ormondo Maini; the chorus and orchestra were formed by approximately 120 and 100 participants respectively. Further performances with Verdi took place in Paris (1874, 1875 and 1876), London (1875), Vienna (1875), Cologne (1877) and Milan (1879), the last of these for the benefit of the victims of a flood that had hit northern Italy.

artistic event of the year'.⁴ Numerous observers took pains to explain its relationship with the centuries-old Italian tradition of sacred music: Filippi even ventured that the piece would influence the development of all future religious art.⁵ The nationalist overtones, repeated at three further performances of the *Requiem* at La Scala a few days later, loom large in contemporary reviews. As so often during the period, Italian anxieties about crisis and degeneration – whether political, social, moral or artistic – were negotiated on musical grounds by extolling the nation's latest most conspicuous compositional achievement.⁶ In the circumstances, the service celebrated by Monsignor Giuseppe Calvi, provost of the *cappella metropolitana*, went almost unnoticed in press reports – as did, more curiously, any substantial connection with Manzoni.⁷

There is, however, one unexpected route to retrieving the event's liturgical component: via the composer's autograph score. This most treasured musical object received unusual treatment in several respects. For one thing, and contrary to his standard practice, Verdi demanded that his publisher Giulio Ricordi return the *Requiem* autograph to him after the first performances (rather than keep it in the

⁴ 'una novella vittoria dell'arte italiana': Amintore Galli, in *Il secolo*, 23 May 1874, 2; 'nel regno dell'arte, il più grande avvenimento dell'anno': 'Z', in *Gazzetta ufficiale del Regno d'Italia*, 29 May 1874, 1. Leone Fortis was even more explicit in his patriotic zeal: 'Udendo la messa di Verdi, noi abbiamo sentito l'orgoglio di appartenere ad una nazione che può in arte tenere sempre il primato del mondo [...] e ad una città che onora la memoria di un grande Scrittore con l'opera di un grande Maestro': Dottor Verità, in *Il pungolo*, 23 May 1874 (morning issue), 2.

⁵ 'la *Messa da Requiem* del Verdi è destinata, pei suoi nuovi e singolari caratteri, a segnare una linea impensata di demarcazione nello sviluppo dell'arte religiosa, aprendole forse un più vasto orizzonte': Filippo Filippi, in *La perseveranza*, 23 May 1874, 1. Filippi's statement was echoed by a critic in Venice the following year: 'il *Requiem* di Verdi [...] segnerà indubbiamente un'era nuova per le composizioni di carattere sacro': *Gazzetta di Venezia*, quoted from *Il Requiem del maestro Giuseppe Verdi a Venezia al Teatro Malibran nel luglio 1875* (Venice, 1875), 8. The Venice correspondent for the *GMM* argued that: 'Il *Requiem* di Verdi porrà nella Storia della musica sacra le due famose colonne d'Ercole: è impossibile arrivare più in là': 'P. F.', in *GMM*, 18 July 1875, 236.

⁶ Most of the correspondence about the *Requiem* has been published. One unpublished letter to Verdi by Tito Ricordi (12 June 1873) contains the following affectionate remarks, which underline the national significance of the project: 'Permetti che io venga a porgerti le mie più entusiastiche congratulazioni pel tuo sublime pensiero di scrivere una Messa per l'anniversario della morte di Manzoni. Sì, lo ripeto, sublime pensiero possibile ad attuarsi solamente in questa nostra patria terra altre volte chiamata dei morti!! Infatti quale altra nazione potrebbe in quest'epoca vantare due uomini di genio, così grandi che l'uno fosse veramente ed in tutto degno di onorare la memoria dell'altro? Che il cielo mi conservi in salute per godere all'epoca prefissa delle sublimi, religiose melodie che avrai composte per questo Santo e grande Scopo': from the digital archive of the Istituto di studi verdiani (original at Villa Verdi, Sant'Agata).

⁷ Calvi also celebrated the Mass at Manzoni's funeral; see *La perseveranza*, 30 May 1873, 1.

firm's archive, as usually occurred with operas). It was not until December 1897 that the composer finally released it, handing it over – perhaps in an act of gratitude, perhaps in a nostalgia-driven clearing of the decks – to Teresa Stolz, the soprano and close friend of Verdi's who had been one of the original performers.⁸ All of this might tell us nothing more than Verdi's attachment to the work. However, bound between each movement of the score are 'rubric pages' (a total of six) that provide indications of what was to happen in between. Such notes, David Rosen has suggested, must have been written to help Verdi (the conductor) 'fit the movements of the *Requiem* into the plainchant Ambrosian Mass' celebrated by Monsignor Calvi.⁹ Indeed their content ranges from records of Latin prayers to visual cues for the movements of the liturgical participants; from indications of when to attack the next piece to excerpts of plainchant.¹⁰ Engaging with Verdi's autograph thus discloses a gap in early discussion of the work: a discrepancy between the all-too-apparent religious-cum-artistic character of the 1874 commemoration, and journalistic accounts of the event as a matter of almost exclusively musical and nationalistic concern.¹¹

This early critical trend has been followed up in scholarly literature. Ever since the work's first nineteenth-century performances, and Hans von Bülow's famous criticism of it as an *Oper im Kirchengewande* ('opera in ecclesiastical robes'), the '*Requiem* Problem' has been posed mostly in terms of musical genre: the extent to which Verdi's composition bears traces of an operatic or,

⁸ See David Rosen, *Critical Commentary* to Giuseppe Verdi, *Messa da Requiem per l'anniversario della morte di Manzoni 22 maggio 1874*, ed. David Rosen (Chicago and Milan, 1990), 3-4.

⁹ Rosen, *Critical Commentary*, 5.

¹⁰ See the facsimile edition of the autograph, published by Ricordi in 1941 with a preface by Ildebrando Pizzetti.

¹¹ Early sidelining of any connection between Verdi's composition and the service (albeit restricted to that single, San Marco performance) is thought-provoking, especially in the context of contemporary tensions between political and religious authorities. These had come to the surface early on, when the Milan city council had first convened to discuss plans for the Manzoni commemoration. Arguments arose about whether it would be appropriate for the municipality to associate itself with a religious ceremony. The council eventually approved the project; but given the conflicts between the newly-born Italian nation state and the Church (conflicts made harsher by the conquest of Rome in 1870), the potential implications of mingling secular and religious interests were to remain a focus of debate during subsequent months. They were, however, mostly reformulated in musical polemics about the genre of Verdi's work. For the discussions of the Manzoni commemoration by the city council, see *Atti del municipio di Milano. Annata 1873-74* (Milan, 1874), session of 24 February 1874, n. 89, 362-3, a record of which was published in *Il pungolo*, 25 February 1874, 2-3.

alternatively, a sacred, idiom. With these considerations have also come attempts to define Verdi's work from a political perspective. The politics of Verdi's *Requiem* has been spotted not only in the composer's decision to pay public homage to Manzoni – one of Italy's most emblematic artistic figures during the period – but also in his turn to sacred composition and his tackling of new musical styles.¹² Leafing through Verdi's autograph – pursuing momentarily the intertwining of Verdi's music with the plainchant intoned in other parts of the 1874 liturgical celebration – nevertheless also raises a different set of questions: questions concerning that early critical dismissal of the *Requiem*'s liturgical nexus; why Verdi's composition became so blithely removed from the context of the Ambrosian Mass of which it formed part. Such dissociation, I shall suggest, may have allowed the *Requiem* to be seen as 'the Other' to the *canto fermo* relentlessly transmitted by the Church. Rather than evoking an anachronistic adherence to any sort of musical conventions (which, because of their very fixity, could only 'degenerate'), the *Requiem* came to embody the essence of the teleological drive that pushed music and history forward.¹³ As we shall see, an interest in the progressive quality of Verdi's music drove nineteenth-century Italian reports at least as much as did an attempt to emphasise the *Requiem*'s connections with a burgeoning repertoire of 'old' sacred Italian music. On a wider scale, claims for musical progress and innovation, as well as for the moral, 'regenerative' power of music, are to be seen in connection with widespread tropes of crisis and

¹² Hans von Bülow made his criticism in a two-part article published in the *Allgemeine Zeitung* (Munich) on 28 May and 1 June 1874. For some recent accounts of the work's early reception in Italy and abroad, see Rosen, *Verdi*; Gundula Kreuzer, "'Oper im Kirchengewande'"? Verdi's *Requiem* and the Anxieties of the Young German Empire', *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 58/2 (2005), 399-449 (a revised version is included in her *Verdi and the Germans: From Unification to the Third Reich* [Cambridge, 2010], 39-84); and Laura Basini, 'Verdi and Sacred Revivalism in Post Unification Italy', *19th-Century Music*, 28/2 (2004), 133-59. For a reading of the *Requiem* as a message of national unity, one grounded in the Italian resonances of Verdi's musical language, see Pierluigi Petrobelli, 'Un messaggio di unità nazionale', in *Messa da Requiem*, programme note for the Verdi Festival 2001 at the Teatro Regio in Parma, 11-15. For an interpretation of the work as a farewell to an entire period of Italian history, see Rubens Tedeschi, 'Requiem per il Risorgimento', programme notes for a performance of the work at La Scala in September 1985, 15-18, and James Hepokoski, 'Verdi's *Requiem*: A Memorial for an Epoch', programme note for *Verdi: 'Requiem'*, Deutsche Grammophon 423674-2 (1989), 13-17.

¹³ Katharine Ellis has noted that unlike more recent musical genres, plainchant, far from developing, seemed able only to 'degenerate'; see Ellis, *The Politics of Plainchant in fin-de-siècle France* (Aldershot, 2013), xvi. My thanks to Professor Ellis for sharing an early version of some chapters with me.

degeneration that pervaded nineteenth-century discourses, both Italian and European, of various types.

On the musical side, and as we saw in Chapter Two, opera had been at the core of such debates in Italy since at least the 1860s. It also figured prominently, as mentioned earlier, in discussions of the *Requiem*'s musical genre. But no 'German versus Italian' dispute, such as those permeating contemporaneous operatic debates, was fought over Verdi's latest work. Often-rehearsed criticisms of Wagnerian influences on Verdi, which could easily have been applied to certain passages in the *Requiem*, left hardly any trace in the press (in Italy at least); nor was the future of Italian opera, apparently so uncertain and so tightly bound up with each and every new work by the composer, often addressed.¹⁴ I would not want, here, to blur the line separating what were two distinct groups of concerns: those regarding the decadence of Italian opera and those pertaining to the hoped-for resurgence of 'old' sacred music. But Verdi's *Requiem* nevertheless came to be interrogated in ways that were, so to speak, operatically resonant: similar tensions and contradictions, perhaps even shared attempts to (re)define what constituted 'truly Italian music', ran through both operatic and sacred music discussions during the period. On a yet wider level, nineteenth-century accounts of Verdi's sacred composition articulate larger cultural trends, ones in which uneasy opposites – old/new, sacred/secular or progress/crisis – coexisted and interacted. By so doing, such writings lay bare the politics of Verdi's *Requiem* in multiform, subtle ways, ones whose conciliatory gestures may still be of interest for us today.

In what follows, I will use Verdi's work – both excerpts from the music and instances of its controversial Italian reception – to destabilise longstanding, perhaps over-emphasised nineteenth-century dichotomies. Without denying that binary oppositions were endemic to contemporary music debates, I want to argue for a greater historical permeability between the elements of such pairings. I shall suggest that the discursive platform based on such dichotomies reverberated with

¹⁴ References to the German influences did, however, surface in articles from abroad. Benoît Jean Baptiste Jouvin argued that 'nell'ultime tre grandi opere che ho citato [*Don Carlos*, *Aida* e *Messa da Requiem*], Verdi si è spinto verso le nubi alemanne, ma conservando nei suoi occhi, per illuminargli la via, gli splendori del cielo italiano': trans. in and quoted from *GMM*, 23 May 1875, 168. A critic for the *Daily Telegraph* spotted 'una tendenza manifesta verso le idee germaniche' in Verdi's work: trans. in and quoted from 'Supplemento al n. 21' of the *GMM*, 23 May 1875, 6.

wider (not solely musical) cultural attempts to define an Italian identity, one constructed through comparison and contrast to both a temporal and a geographical Other. This way, I hope to propose both looser and more long-range political resonances for Verdi's *Requiem* in late-nineteenth-century Italy: resonances that potentially also made the work dovetail with contemporary beliefs in music's power to generate moral and socio-political change.

National religious sounds

As is well known, the origins of Verdi's project go back to 1869, when the composer suggested the multi-authored Mass in memory of Rossini. As recalled in Chapter Two, according to Verdi's plan the piece was to be performed in Bologna on the first anniversary of the great man's death, after which the score would be sealed away in an archive. Although eventually completed, the project was not performed (at least, not until 1988). Verdi's contribution was a *Libera me*, for the final movement of the Mass. A few years later, the piece provided the initial material for Verdi's individual homage to Manzoni.¹⁵

The Rossini and Manzoni compositions were in many ways different in scope and conception. The former aimed at representing, in Verdi's words, a *Monumento all'Arte, a festa patria*: an event whose political and historical significance would stem from its exclusively Italian authorship and from a single performance at a precise place and date. Failing to accomplish these conditions would result (to quote Verdi's expression once again) in a 'mere work of art'.¹⁶ The *Messa da Requiem* for Manzoni, on the other hand, was conceived not just as a tribute to a highly-esteemed Italian, but also as a piece for immediate circulation. Verdi did insist on the *Messa* being played on the exact date of the anniversary of Manzoni's death;¹⁷ yet, soon after the Milan performances, he took it on a tour of

¹⁵ For an account of the *Requiem*'s compositional history, see Verdi, *Messa da Requiem*, xli-lvi.

¹⁶ Verdi's letters to Giulio Ricordi (18 November 1869), Angelo Mariani (19 August 1869) and Camillo Casarini (10 November 1869), in *I copialettere di Giuseppe Verdi*, ed. Gaetano Cesari and Alessandro Luzio (Milan, 1913), 218, 211 and 217. Verdi wished there would be 'nessuna mano straniera' involved in the project: see his proposal to Ricordi, published in *GMM*, 22 November 1868, 379.

¹⁷ 'Voi sapete che queste solennità (come dissi altra volta per Rossini) devono aver luogo nel giorno dell'anniversario o mai più': Verdi's letter to Giulio Ricordi (14 February 1874), in Franco Abbiati, *Giuseppe Verdi*, 4 vols. (Milan, 1959), III, 665. 'qui si tratta d'una Messa scritta appositamente per

major Italian and foreign theatres (Milan, Paris, London and Vienna), the income of this resulting in journalistic criticism of the supposedly commercial nature of his initial proposal.¹⁸

Few comparisons were drawn between the two commemorative projects at the time. Moreover, knowledge of Verdi's 'recycling' of the 1869 *Libera me* for the Manzoni Mass did not emerge immediately – at least not until 1876, when the fact was mentioned in an article concerning a performance in Genoa.¹⁹ However, a different set of connections between Verdi and Rossini was more easily made: that concerning their sacred compositions.²⁰ As Gundula Kreuzer has observed, Verdi's idea for the *Requiem*'s European tour was to some extent inspired by the commercial success of Rossini's *Petite messe solennelle* (1863/67).²¹ After Rossini's death, the unperformed orchestral version of the *Petite messe* had begun a voyage through several countries – one that took it, among other places, to Italy. Responses were mixed and, besides repeating in certain respects the older tale of

l'anniversario della morte di Manzoni. Trasportandone l'epoca, diventa un'accademia, un pretesto per far della musica, e quella Grand'Anima, invece di onorarla, sarebbe in questo modo quasi profanata': Verdi's letter to Belinzaghi (14 March 1874), in *I copialettere*, 286, fn. 3 (with a mistaken date). And in 1883, following attempts by Arrigo Boito to persuade him to conduct the *Requiem* at the inauguration of the Manzoni monument in Milan, Verdi replied: 'La circostanza è certamente solenne, ma... sarebbe un Bis – Detesto i Bis': letter to Boito (7 April 1883), in *Carteggio Verdi-Boito*, ed. Mario Medici and Marcello Conati, 2 vols. (Parma, 1978), I, 68.

¹⁸ 'Quanto era più dignitoso e da vero Italiano il provvedere in modo che quella messa, giacché quella doveva essere, potesse a tutti gli anniversari della morte del gran Manzoni, venir eseguita in una chiesa di Milano! Certo che si guadagnava meno danaro, ma si perdeva anche meno decoro. Invece sordidamente speculando si fecero oggetto di quasi profano spettacolo, le parole del più grande ed augusto rito della Cattolica Religione': Vincenzo Sassaroli, *Considerazioni sullo stato attuale dell'arte musicale in Italia e sull'importanza artistica dell'opera Aida e della Messa di Verdi* (Genoa, 1876), 33; 'speculazioni bottegali', 'il Manzoni fu preso come pretesto per comporre e far eseguire una messa, e soprattutto per far quattrini': Giulio Roberti, in *La stampa*, 5 August 1879, 2. Verdi had been anxious to stress the disinterested nature of his proposal early on: 'Fatemi il piacere di telegrafare subito a Milano a chi credete perché venga smentita subito stasera la notizia che si eseguirà la *Messa* a pagamento': letter to Giulio Ricordi (20-23 April 1874), digital archive of the Istituto nazionale di studi verdiani (original at Archivio Ricordi, Milan).

¹⁹ 'l'ultimo pezzo della *Messa da Requiem* in parola il *Libera me* fu scritto da Verdi in quell'epoca quando diversi maestri italiani estratti a sorte scrissero ciascuno un pezzo della progettata *Messa* in omaggio a Rossini': 'X. Y.', in *Il commercio di Genova*, 19 August 1876, quoted from *Giuseppe Verdi, genovese*, ed. Roberto Iovino and Stefano Verdino (Lucca, 2000), 139. This is the earliest reference to this fact that I have been able to find. Pougin referred to Verdi's 'recycling' in *Le Ménestrel*, 17 March 1878, 121-3.

²⁰ See, for instance, Girolamo Alessandro Biaggi, 'Rassegna musicale', *Nuova antologia di scienze, lettere ed arti*, 26/7 (1874), 772-82, here 781.

²¹ See Kreuzer, "'Oper im Kirchengewande?'" , 412-13, and *Verdi and the Germans*, 51-2.

the contentious reception of the *Stabat Mater* (1832/41), raised issues to re-emerge in the Verdi debates.²²

The premiere of the *Petite messe* (in Rossini's revised, 1867 version) at Paris's Théâtre Italien in February 1869 was preceded by much expectation, as were the first Italian performances during subsequent months.²³ Following initial enthusiasm, the work became the centre of polemics in various parts of Italy (Bologna, Turin and Milan). Debates focused on the (in)appropriateness of the theatre for a religious piece. After the work's Parisian debut, the critic of Ricordi's *Gazzetta musicale di Milano* lamented:

[La *Petite messe*] Ben altro effetto farebbe egualmente in una cattedrale, perché lo strumentale ne è ricco e possente; ma al teatro, splendidamente illuminato, senza quel mistero, quella solennità che deve accompagnar la musica religiosa; al teatro, con gli artisti seduti lì, in faccia agli spettatori, in abito nero, con le spettatrici che agitano i ventagli, giuocano cogli occhialetti o salutano le persone di loro conoscenza, l'esecuzione perde molto del suo bel *carattere religioso*.²⁴

[[The *Petite messe*] would make a very different effect in a cathedral, because the orchestration is rich and powerful; but in the theatre, richly illuminated, it lacks that mystery, that solemn character that should accompany sacred music; in the theatre, with the performers seated in front of the audience and dressed in black, with the women in the audience fanning themselves, playing with their opera glasses and greeting their acquaintances, the performance loses much of its beautiful *religious character*.]

Similarly, following the first La Scala performance, composer and music teacher Alberto Mazzucato criticised the *sconvenienza del luogo*, claiming that the correct environment for the *Petite messe* was *il tempio cristiano*.²⁵ The same sentiments were voiced by another critic, who complained about stubborn operatic habits (breaking up of the composition into two parts, *come un libretto d'opera*, and

²² For a collection of reviews of Rossini's *Stabat Mater*, see *Lo Stabat Mater di Rossini giudicato dalla stampa periodica francese ed italiana, ossia raccolta dei migliori articoli artistici pubblicati dal giornalismo delle due nazioni sovra tale argomento* (Milan, 1843).

²³ See Gino Stefani, 'La Messe solennelle di Rossini nella critica dell'epoca', *Bollettino del centro rossiniano di studi*, 8/4-6 (1968), 137-48, and Roberta Montemorra Marvin, 'La Petite messe solennelle di Rossini: la sua prima esecuzione in Italia', *Bollettino del centro rossiniano di studi*, 41 (2001), 37-82.

²⁴ 'A. A.', in *GMM*, 14 March 1869, 88.

²⁵ Alberto Mazzucato, in *Il mondo artistico*, 2 May 1869, 1. Comments of this kind are abundant: 'Questo genere di lavori musicali non vanno sentiti in teatro [...] Ora ne pare che per questa messa di Rossini un tempio sarebbe stato più adatto di un teatro': Lodovico Settimo Silvestri, *Della vita e delle opere di Gioacchino Rossini: notizie biografico-artistico-aneddotico-critiche* (Milan, 1874), 236.

addition of a ballet at the end) that had affected the concert.²⁶ The very forms, that is, in which the piece was realised were felt to impact negatively on its religious atmosphere, possibly even on the audience's moral conduct. So too were aspects of its interpretation by the singers. As one critic reminded his readers,

Non bisogna eseguire un pezzo di musica da chiesa come si eseguirebbe un solfeggio qualunque. Bisogna che la voce si animi, diventi espressiva secondo la parola, secondo l'arcano senso del verso. Soprattutto vuolsi quell'accento convinto che è la caratteristica della fede, poi gli slanci ardenti dell'anima innamorata del bello, del vero.²⁷

[One should not perform a piece of church music as one would sol-fa any old piece. The voice should become animated, express the meaning of the words, following the hidden sense of the poetic line. Above all, what one needs is the sincere tone typical of faith, and the burning impetus of the soul which loves beauty and truth.]

There were, nevertheless, elements of Rossini's style that made negotiation of the *Petite messe*'s sacred character even more difficult. The work was agreed to be less problematic than the *Stabat Mater*, but remained an oddity in its blending of modern (operatic) and ancient (sacred) musical idioms.²⁸ What the latter pole of this dichotomy meant is not easy to define, but spotting some of the categories, or musical gestures, with which it reverberated is important for understanding the backdrop to the Verdian polemics.

What was generally understood in Italy by 'good' sacred music was solemn, austere vocal compositions, relying on diatonic contrapuntal procedures and free from instrumental or rhythmic effects that could impede understanding of the liturgical text. These conditions were thought to have been accomplished most notably by Palestrina, hence the label 'alla Palestrina' for music in this style.²⁹ The reasons for Palestrina's nineteenth-century popularity with Italians were not solely musical. By the latter part of the century, and through the heroic image fostered by his first Italian biographer, Giuseppe Baini, the composer had become a symbol of Italian-ness, a model in 'moral terms'.³⁰ Revival of his music, both through

²⁶ 'Il corriere', in *Il mondo artistico*, 2 May 1869, 2.

²⁷ 'M.', in *Il monitore di Bologna*, 24 March 1869, quoted from Marvin, 'La Petite messe', 53.

²⁸ See, for instance, Filippi's article in *La perseveranza*, rept. in *GMM*, 4 April 1869, 115-17.

²⁹ See Stefani, 'La Messe Solennelle', 142, and Marvin, 'La Petite messe solennelle', 51.

³⁰ Giuseppe Baini, *Memorie storico-critiche della vita e delle opere di Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina*, 2 vols. (Rome, 1828); Marco Di Pasquale, 'Inventing Palestrina: Ideological and Historiographical Approaches in Nineteenth-Century Italy', *Schweizer Jahrbuch für*

preparation of editions and (increasingly) through performances, expanded in the last few decades of the century, characterised as they were by the Italian version of the German *Kulturkampf* and the rise of the Cecilian movement. Whatever the actual knowledge of his compositions during the period, Palestrina became a staple in the sacred musical canon that took shape after Italian Unification – a canon that served Church as well as nationalist agendas.³¹

Perceptions of Palestrina's music were, however, complex. As James Garratt has stressed in the German context, there is no easy way of reducing the nineteenth-century expression 'alla Palestrina' to a single notion.³² One recurrent theme, in Italian perceptions at least, was the importance of imitative counterpoint: 'canons, imitation and fugues technically constitute Palestrina's music', proclaimed Amintore Galli in a collection of biographies of past and present composers.³³ In similar vein, Vincenzo Bigliani maintained that, ever since Palestrina, the two elements most typical of sacred music had been 'fugue and dissonance', and that

Musikwissenschaft – Annales Suisses de Musicologie – Annuario Svizzero di Musicologia, 30 (2010), 223-66, 239.

³¹ For a chronological account of the late-nineteenth-century sacred-music 'renaissance' in Italy, see Felice Rainoldi, *Sentieri della musica sacra: dall'Ottocento al Concilio Vaticano II: documentazione su ideologie e prassi* (Rome, 1996). See also the more specific contributions by Basini, 'Verdi and Sacred Revivalism', and Roberto Calabretto, 'Tomadini, Amelli e la nascita di Musica Sacra', in Candotti, Tomadini, *De Santi e la riforma della musica sacra*, ed. Franco Colussi and Lucia Boscolo Folegana (Udine, 2011), 471-8. For music and the Cecilian movement in Italy, see the collection of essays in *Aspetti del cecilianesimo nella cultura musicale italiana dell'Ottocento*, ed. Mauro Casadei Turrone Monti and Cesarino Ruini (Città del Vaticano, 2004). For the sacred-music revival in Milan, see Michelangelo Gabbriellini, 'La musica sacra', in *Milano musicale: 1861-1897*, ed. Bianca Maria Antolini (Lucca, 1999), 311-31.

³² See James Garratt, *Palestrina and the German Romantic Imagination: Interpreting Historicism in Nineteenth-Century Music* (Cambridge, 2002), 3. The nineteenth-century reception of Palestrina in Italy has received little attention from scholars, and any study on this topic should be pursued bearing in mind local differences. For some remarks on performance practices of Palestrina in Rome, see Angela Pachovsky, 'La prassi esecutiva dei mottetti del Palestrina nel periodo ottocentesco della Cappella Pontificia: testimonianze dei diari sistini', in *Palestrina e l'Europa: Atti del III convegno internazionale di studi, 6-9 ottobre 1994*, ed. Giancarlo Rostirolla, Stefania Soldati and Elena Zomparelli (Palestrina, 2006), 1089-112, and Leopold M. Kantner and Angela Pachovsky, *La Cappella musicale Pontificia nell'Ottocento* (Rome, 1998), esp. 65-78. Within the French context, Ellis has addressed this issue in her 'Palestrina et la musique dite "palestrinienne" en France au XIXe siècle: questions d'exécution et de réception', in *La Renaissance et sa musique au XIXe siècle*, ed. Philippe Vendrix (Paris, 2000), 155-90, and in her *Interpreting the Musical Past: Early Music in Nineteenth-Century France* (New York, 2005), 179-207.

³³ 'I canoni, le imitazioni e le fughe costituiscono tecnicamente la musica palestriniana': Amintore Galli, *La musica ed i musicisti dal secolo X sino ai nostri giorni, ovvero biografie cronologiche d'illustri maestri* (Milan, 1871), 18.

the fugal style was ‘most appropriate for sacred texts and the liturgy’.³⁴ Even the authoritative journal *Musica sacra*, in its inaugural issue of 1877, declared that ‘the fugal, imitative style [is] the most appropriate for the purposes of sacred music’ (here ‘sacred music’ must be taken in the second of the two meanings indicated by the Church: plainchant and ‘alla Palestrina’ music).³⁵ More acute observers such as Girolamo Alessandro Biaggi, keen on emphasising musical progress, noted a transformation in Palestrina’s style after the *Missa papae Marcelli*, which marked the beginning of a second manner characterised by greater reliance on Italian melody (as opposed to the contrapuntal artifice of the Flemish school).³⁶ Overall, ‘alla Palestrina’ compositions and church music more generally implied prominent voices undisturbed by musical instruments (except the organ).³⁷ Both Galli and Bigliani commented on this: the first praised the ‘gentle religious effusion [which] is instilled in [Palestrina’s] extraordinary vocal symphonies’, while the second

³⁴ ‘la fuga, e le dissonanze’, ‘acconcio assai alle sacre parole, alla liturgia’: Vincenzo Bigliani, *La Messa in musica, ossia considerazioni sulla musica sacra e sua importanza* (Florence, 1872), 22-3.

³⁵ ‘lo stile fugato e imitativo [è] il più conveniente allo scopo della musica sacra’: *Musica sacra*, 15 May 1877, quoted from Calabretto, ‘Tomadini, Amelli’, 478, fn. 23. A similar claim was made by Mattia Cipollone: ‘il misticismo si trova nella musica vocale di stile armonico e fugato, massime nei Corali; e si trova ben anche nella musica strumentale di stile severo ed osservato, specialmente in quell’organica’: in *Musica sacra*, March-April 1878, 11. Francesco Izzo has also called attention to the learned style as an element closely associated with nineteenth-century Italian church music; see Izzo, ‘A Tale for Survival: Choral Music in Italy’, in *Nineteenth-Century Choral Music*, ed. Donna M. Di Grazia (Abingdon, 2012), 305-31, here 309 and 314-16 (my thanks to Dr Izzo for providing me with a copy of this essay). In this sense, the French understanding of Palestrina during the nineteenth century as outlined by Ellis seems to differ from the Italian one: in France, Palestrina’s music was understood as mostly homophonic and harmonic rather than contrapuntal; see Ellis, *Interpreting the Musical Past*, esp. 182 and 190-1. For the Catholic Church’s conception of sacred music, see the deliberations of the first Catholic congress in Venice in 1874, which declared the ‘vera musica da Chiesa’ to be the ‘canto corale o gregoriano con o senza accompagnamento d’organo, e la musica polifona detta *alla Palestrina*’: quoted from *Deliberazioni dei Congressi cattolici italiani di Venezia e di Firenze* (Bologna, 1876), 32. At the conference, the prominent Cecilian figure and founder of *Musica sacra* Guerrino Amelli also mentioned Gregorian chant and the contrapuntal tradition of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as the true forms of church music; see Amelli’s speech, printed in *Sulla restaurazione della musica sacra in Italia: estratto degli atti del primo Congresso Cattolico italiano tenutosi in Venezia dal 12 al 16 Giugno 1874* (Bologna, 1874), 5-22, here 10-11.

³⁶ See Marco Di Pasquale, ‘Immagini del Rinascimento nella storiografia musicale italiana del secondo Ottocento: due paradigmi’, *Musica e storia*, 13/2 (2005), 279-322, here 299-300.

³⁷ According to Richard L. Crocker, Palestrina’s music ‘was understood by the [nineteenth-century] reformers to be purely vocal (*a cappella*)’: Crocker, *An Introduction to Gregorian Chant* (New Haven and London, 2000), 84. On the ‘constructed’ nature of the vocal and instrumental idioms, and their understanding in relation to an earlier, medieval repertory during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, see Daniel Leech-Wilkinson, *The Modern Invention of Medieval Music: Scholarship, Ideology, Performance* (Cambridge, 2002).

pointed out, in accordance with Church edicts, ‘severity of instrumentation, and sometimes total absence of it’ as a distinctive feature of church music.³⁸

Some of these ideas were rehearsed in responses to Rossini’s *Petite messe*. In an article for *La perseveranza*, Filippi designated among the *Messe*’s most successful ‘non-theatrical’ pieces the ‘Christe eleison’ from the *Kyrie* (a double canon for four-part chorus in a *cappella* style), the ‘Cum Sancto Spiritu’ from the *Gloria* (a fugue) and the *Sanctus* (for soloists and chorus with no orchestral accompaniment). (The *Offertorio*, an organ prelude, was also regarded as sacred-style because of the instrument’s church connotations.) More precisely, the critic welcomed the ‘four-part canon in the *stile osservato, alla Palestrina*, on the words *Christe eleison*, written with sublime expertise and with all the severity and unction required by the religious style’. He went on to proclaim the ‘Laudamus’ (from the *Gloria*) *religiosissimo*, because of its insistent chords and the (non-imitative) contrapuntal entries of the voices, and then applauded the fugue of the ‘Cum Sancto’, in which Rossini had struck a magnificent balance between contrapuntal severity and free melodic inspiration. What is more, in recalling Rossini’s *Stabat Mater*, Filippi argued that the only piece one could call ‘authentically evangelical’, expressing ‘the religious, Christian feeling consecrated by tradition’, was ‘Quando corpus morietur’ – a homophonic unaccompanied quartet.³⁹

³⁸ ‘in codeste mirabili sinfonie vocali è trasfuso un soave effluvio religioso’: Galli, *La musica*, 18; ‘la severità della strumentazione, e talvolta la mancanza totale di questa’: Bigliani, *La Messa*, 24. The *a cappella* scoring seems also to have been a defining characteristic of ‘alla Palestrina’ compositions for Verdi; see his letter to Ferdinand Hiller (7 January 1880), in *Carteggi verdiani*, ed. Alessandro Luzio, 4 vols. (Rome, 1935-47), II, 333, in which he describes his *Pater noster* (1880) as ‘scritto a cinque parti senza accompagnamento nello stile Palestrina, ben inteso colle modulazioni ed armonie moderne’.

³⁹ ‘canone a quattro parti nello stile osservato, alla Palestrina, sulle parole *Christe eleison*, scritto con magistero sublime e con tutta la severità e l’unzione voluta dallo stile religioso’, ‘veramente evangelico’, ‘il sentimento religioso, cristiano, come l’ha consacrato la tradizione’: Filippi, in *La perseveranza*, quoted from *GMM*, 4 April 1869, 115-17. Such considerations were not exclusive to Filippi’s voice, nor were they applied only to Rossini. In March 1869, another critic described the *Christe* from Rossini’s *Messe* as ‘un canone a quattro parti [...] degno dei grandi maestri dello scorso secolo’: ‘A. A.’, in *GMM*, 14 March 1869, 88. Following the Rossini celebrations in Pesaro in the summer of the same year, Cherubini’s D-minor *Requiem* elicited the following remarks: ‘Notarono gl’intendenti nella Messa del Cherubini specialmente il *Requiem* a tre voci, tutto a corali, e giustamente osservarono come quel continuato intrecciamento di voci fosse così industriosamente temperato da cessare ogni noia e ogni confusione’; ‘Alcuno celebrò sovra le altre parti della Messa il *Pie Jesu* a sole voci, in cui è mirabile l’effetto di un clarino assai opportunamente introdotto’: *Relazione delle pompe funebri fatte in Pesaro in onore di Gioacchino Rossini nel suo*

The boundaries within which sacred Italian music lay were not, then, easily established. Vacillation between distinct types of musical gesture allowed room for negotiation and, most importantly, chances to utter musical-aesthetic statements that could be reabsorbed into definitions of Italian music more generally. Within this framework, terms such as ‘contrapuntal’ or ‘vocal’ were not merely descriptive tools for portraying the musical surface of a piece; they were, rather, politically-charged categories, the use of which carried implications for perceptions of the musical past and future.

All of this, of course, should be read in the context of the political, cultural and musical milieu of post-Unification Italy, a picture of which has been already sketched in Chapter Two. Musical criticism was deeply imbued with the rhetoric of nationalist discourse, of which it also followed the same historicist trends. At a period when Italian opera seemed to have exhausted its capacity to regenerate itself except by capitulating to elements ascribed to the French and Germans, critical pronouncements increasingly stressed the importance of unmistakably Italian aspects of music: ‘melody’ was defended against the intrusion of complex harmonic devices; *vocalità* (particularly pre-Verdian *bel canto*) against the tyranny of ever-weightier orchestration. Furthermore, supporters of the Italian tradition appealed to an increasingly old, long-forgotten repertoire of both operatic and non-operatic works.

Palestrina was the foremost Italian composer who became a model for modern church musicians. His rising influence and the fact that his compositions enact a notable fusion of vocality and counterpoint may explain why Italians emphasised both these elements of his style. Indeed, by the late nineteenth century Italians understood counterpoint as a trait of their own musical heritage. Vocality, for its part, lent itself to yet more resonant and broad-ranging music-historical arguments: it reverberated not only with memories and ideas of ‘truly religious’, unaccompanied church music, but also with conceptions of the most authentic aspects of Italian opera.⁴⁰ Both such categories – counterpoint and vocality – were

giorno onomastico 21 agosto 1869 e de' trattenimenti musicali che le seguirono (Pesaro, 1869), 25-6.

⁴⁰ The extent to which an Italian penchant for counterpoint was linked during the period with a nationalist defence of vocality can only be made clearer by the fact that, as Carl Dahlhaus noted, the

at the centre of early discussions of Verdi's *Requiem*. However, their politics were made more complex by unusual elements of Verdi's musical language, ones that (as we shall see) problematise nationalist-inflected nineteenth-century binaries.

Blurring idioms

Verdi's personal role in Italy's search for cultural roots after Unification was by no means passive. As we saw in Chapter Two, increasingly from the late 1860s and the 1870s, he railed against the 'Germanisation' of Italian composers, and soon became a self-appointed spokesman of those wishing to defend Italy's musical traditions. What is more, his motto 'torniamo all'antico, e sarà un progresso' came to circulate widely later in the century, usually in books, journals and musical editions that supported the 'vocal status' of Italian music. True, the motto acquired a variety of meanings through dissemination, while Verdi's original intention in his letter to Florimo had been to recommend thorough studies of fugue and counterpoint for students. But in line with contemporary trends, he too understood counterpoint as a legacy of Italy's musical past: as a feature of ancient Italian music that, via Palestrina and his contemporaries, was usually associated (at least according to the composer's epistolary statements) with the human voice. In his letter about *l'antico*, Verdi provided advice and models for vocal composition; and when elsewhere he mentioned a piece, later discarded, for the opening of Act 3 of *Aida* that in his opinion could have won him 'a position as a contrapuntalist in any old conservatoire', he referred to it as a 'four-part chorus worked out in the style of Palestrina'.⁴¹ That being said, Verdi's relationship with learned, 'Italianate' compositional devices was made more complex by his increasing experimentation with that idiom in not only vocal, but also foreign-influenced instrumental music.

The putative vocal quality of Italian music was a leitmotif of a large number of public and private pronouncements by Verdi on the burning topic of Italian

nineteenth-century Bach 'renaissance' was mostly an instrumental phenomenon; see Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth-Century Music*, trans. J. Bradford Robinson (Berkeley, 1989), 31.

⁴¹ 'ho sostituito un coro e romanza *Aida* ad altro coro a quattro voci, lavorato ad imitazione uso Palestrina, che avrebbe potuto farmi cercare un bravo dai parrucconi e farmi aspirare (cheché ne dica Faccio) ad un posto di contrappuntista in un Liceo qualunque': Verdi's letter to Giulio Ricordi (12 August 1871), in *I copialettere*, 676; for the date, see *Verdi's Aida: The History of an Opera in Letters and Documents*, ed. Hans Busch (Minneapolis, 1978), 202, fn. 1.

music of the future. ‘*Our art is not instrumental*’, was his reaction in a letter to his friend Clara Maffei following the inaugural concert of the Società orchestrale della Scala in 1879.⁴² He had articulated the same idea a few weeks earlier to Opprandino Arrivabene, as well as in an official letter to the Società orchestrale. In all cases, he hoped that the recent Italian developments in instrumental music (by way of the inauguration of orchestral and quartet societies) would soon be complemented by cultivation of ‘that art that was *ours* and once distinct from the *other one*’ – namely, the vocal works of Palestrina and other composers of the time.⁴³ Starting in the 1870s and continuing until the late 1890s, Verdi himself set out to contribute to the resurgence of this vocal tradition by composing pieces – the *Requiem*, the *Pater noster* of 1880 and the *Quattro pezzi sacri* of 1889-96 – that involved contrapuntal and/or unaccompanied vocal writing.

At the same time, though, he applied contrapuntal procedures to several instrumental pieces – such as the String Quartet (1873) and the soon-disowned *Aida* overture (1871) – that are overtly rooted in foreign musical traditions. The language of the former piece, in particular, is so idiomatically instrumental that one cannot avoid relating its contrapuntal style to Germanic rather than Palestrinian models.⁴⁴ Such ambivalent attitudes of Verdi’s to learned compositional devices may be seen as emblematic of a composer famously absorbed, in his later years, in a twofold project: one conservative, not to say reactionary in its verbal

⁴² ‘l’arte nostra non è l’istromentale’: Verdi’s letter to Clara Maffei (2 May 1879), in *I copialettere*, 525.

⁴³ ‘Faccio però voti ardentissimi perché questo ramo orchestrale dell’arte riesca bene, col vivo desiderio altresì che l’altro ramo possa venir egualmente coltivato, a fine di ridonare all’Italia quell’arte che era nostra, e distinta dall’altra un giorno’: Verdi’s letter to the Società orchestrale della Scala (4 April 1879), in *I copialettere*, 306. ‘Ma se invece [di costituire società orchestrali e di quartetti] noi in Italia facessimo un *quartetto* di voci per eseguire Palestrina, i suoi *contemporanei*, Marcello ecc. ecc. non sarebbe questa Arte Grande? E sarebbe arte italiana... l’altra no!...’: Verdi’s letter to Opprandino Arrivabene (30 March 1879), in *Verdi intimo: carteggio di Giuseppe Verdi con il Conte Opprandino Arrivabene (1861-1886)*, ed. Annibale Alberti (Milan, 1931), 231-3. See also Verdi’s letter to Giulio Ricordi (April 1878), in *I copialettere*, 626.

⁴⁴ On the String Quartet, see Ennio Speranza, ‘Caratteri e forme di una ‘pianta fuori di clima’: sul quartetto per archi di Verdi’, *Studi verdiani*, 17 (2003), 110-65; for a contextualised view of the *Aida* overture seen in relation to wider, symphonic developments in Italian music of the period under the influence of foreign compositions, see Antonio Rostagno, ‘Ouverture e dramma negli anni Settanta: il caso della sinfonia di *Aida*’, *Studi verdiani*, 14 (1999), 11-50. Another instrumental piece that was deemed to resonate (through counterpoint) with ‘old’ music is the Act-2 prelude of the 1884 *Don Carlo*; see Filippi, in *La perseveranza*, 14 January 1884, article rept. in *Carteggio Verdi-Ricordi: 1882-1885*, ed. Franca Cella, Madina Ricordi and Marisa di Gregorio Casati (Parma, 1994), 405-9, here 408.

formulations (standing up for the safeguarding of the Italian prominence of voice); but at the same time pioneering in its musical results, which draw on a wide variety of harmonic and orchestral devices. As early as 1874, the *Requiem* enters this increasingly murky picture as a paradigmatic case, questioning through music several of those unyielding definitions and abstractions we often like to cast in words.

Vocality is a good a case in point. The *Requiem*'s seven movements draw on a large variety of vocal gestures, often with different music-historical connotations: chant-like, monotone declamation punctuating orchestral discourse (the opening of the *Requiem e Kyrie*); mostly homophonic moments for unaccompanied voices (the beginning of the 'Pie Jesu' from the *Dies irae*); passages with or without orchestral accompaniment that rely on more or less strict contrapuntal procedures (the fugues of the *Sanctus*, of the *Libera me* and of the first version of the 'Liber scriptus' from the *Dies irae*,⁴⁵ as well as *a cappella* passages such as the 'Te decet hymnus' from the *Requiem e Kyrie*); and even powerful outbursts of emotion conveyed through pseudo-operatic declamatory statements (the solo soprano at the opening of the *Libera me* and at the transition to the fugue in the same movement). Responses to this potpourri were various. Contemporary critics were particularly captivated by passages without orchestral accompaniment, which seemed to recall religious music more directly. The 'Te decet hymnus' was described by Filippi as a 'chorale for voices only with imitations, written in the great style of classic art: a real piece for the church'. One of the most acclaimed and encored movements, the *Agnus Dei* struck Verdi's audiences because its first thirteen bars are scored for soprano and mezzo soprano solos singing an octave apart. 'A nice melopoeia, a sort of *cantabile recitative* at the unison, but at the distance of an octave', reported Filippi, while others insisted on the striking fusion of sounds (quite possibly associated with plainchant) achieved by Teresa Stolz and Maria Waldmann.⁴⁶ Some of Verdi's most remarkable massed displays of

⁴⁵ As is well known, Verdi replaced the fugue of the 'Liber scriptus' in 1875 with a mezzo-soprano solo composed for Waldmann. On Verdi's rewriting of this piece, see David Rosen, 'Verdi's "Liber scriptus" Rewritten', *Musical Quarterly*, 55 (1969), 151-69.

⁴⁶ 'corale a voci sole ad imitazione, scritto nel grande stile dell'arte classica: un pezzo veramente da Chiesa'; 'una bella melopia [*sic*], una specie di recitativo cantabile all'unisone [*sic*], ma alla distanza di un'intera ottava': Filippi, in *La perseveranza*, 23 May 1874, 1-2. Amelli, who criticised

contrapuntal mastery (particularly the *Sanctus* fugue) were also welcomed; they showed off Verdi's compositional skills and were deemed to resonate with the old Italian tradition, encouraging chauvinist listeners to hear connections with 'the great musicians of the past'.⁴⁷ Yet, despite repeated praise for these contrapuntal tours de force, vocality remained – in its barest, most stripped down, most naively 'melodic' expressions – the main source of beguilement.⁴⁸

What makes this trend in early reception particularly intriguing is the shadow of instrumental gestures, ever lurking in Verdi's vocal writing. Interpretation of the liturgical text led on occasion the composer to shape, in the words of Carolyn Abbate, a 'marvellous confusion of human sound with the sound of the mouths of the instruments', such as in the 'Tuba mirum' and 'Mors stupebit' sections of the *Dies irae* (where the bass soloist imitates the dotted rhythm of the brass heard before by repeating an accented e-flat).⁴⁹ In fact, Verdi's treatment of the voice in the *Requiem* often invites pause over ways in which so-called Italian vocality might have become re-imagined through a subtle interaction with the instrumental element. To one nineteenth-century German commentator, August Guckeisen, Verdi's writing for the voice recalled an approach to orchestral

Verdi's *Requiem* severely, nonetheless praised the 'soave e maestosa melodia dell'*Agnus Dei*, la quale quasi sdegnando affatto l'accompagnamento istrumentale, colla sua ingenua bellezza ci parve richiamare la sublime semplicità delle melodie gregoriane': in *Sulla restaurazione della musica sacra*, 15. Similarly, Galli commented: 'una melodia lenta, tranquilla, facile [...] pella sua popolare semplicità ricorda l'indole dei canti liturgici': in *Il secolo*, 23 May 1874, 3. On the fusion of the singers' voices, see, for instance: E. Spagnolo, in *Gazzetta di Milano*, 26 May 1874, 2; *Corriere della sera*, 1-2 July 1879, 3; and Blanche Roosevelt, *Verdi, Milan and Othello: Being a Short Life of Verdi, with Letters Written about Milan and the New Opera of Othello: Represented for the First Time on the Stage of La Scala Theatre, February 5, 1887* (London, 1887), 73. The unison chant of the early Christians, loosely recalled by Verdi's writing in the *Agnus Dei*, was linked to the belief that church music has to encourage the believers' unity in the spirit of Christ; see Crocker, *An Introduction to Gregorian Chant*, 25.

⁴⁷ 'Il *Sanctus*, fuga a due cori, scritto al modo antico e che rammenta la maniera del Lotti, del Pergolese e degli altri grandi musicisti del passato – è frutto d'una meditazione altamente artistica. È un capolavoro di fattura e di fantasia': Spagnolo, in *Gazzetta di Milano*, 26 May 1874, 2; 'La *Messa da Requiem* di Verdi è l'ultima perfezione dello stile di Pergolese e Marcello; basta una sola delle tre fughe [...] che vi si riscontrano per confermare nel modo più assoluto la nostra asserzione [...] Il *Sanctus* è una grande *fuga reale* a due cori [...] Essa racchiude tutto lo scibile della scienza dell'armonia e del contrappunto; anzi dell'arte musicale stessa. Oggi Verdi [...] è pari ai più grandi classici d'ogni tempo e d'ogni scuola': Galli, in *Il secolo*, 23 May 1874, 2-3.

⁴⁸ Galli described the *Requiem* as 'un'opera colossale, e da cima a fondo *tutta melodia* di sapore esclusivamente italiano': in *Il secolo*, 23 May 1874, 3.

⁴⁹ Carolyn Abbate, 'Mourning and Apocalypse in Verdi's *Requiem*', programme note for *Verdi: 'Requiem', 'Quattro pezzi sacri'*, Deutsche Grammophon 435884-2 (1993), 11-16, 15.

instruments: ‘To a considerably greater extent than we Germans, the Italians use the human voice instrumentally [...] Solo voices are thus used in the same way as orchestral instruments: singers and players are treated as one large orchestra’. This is why, according to this observer, Verdi the conductor adopted such fast tempi in the *Requiem* fugues, tempi that seemed less appropriate for singers than for an orchestra.⁵⁰

This tension between idioms emerges in particular in pieces where the singers’ melodies seem to be conceived less vocally than instrumentally. Rosen has drawn attention to the theme of the *Agnus Dei*, which relies on extensive word repetition and whose connection with the underlay (as the piece’s compositional history shows) is far from straightforward.⁵¹ What is more, despite the overall flexibility of the thirteen-bar phrase, and the psalmodic connotations stemming from its mostly stepwise motion, the melody sounds oddly squared off (see Example 3.1): constrained, at least for the first ten bars, by the rhythmic and melodic repetitions occurring at the beginning of each of its three sub-phrases (bb. 1, 5 and 8); perhaps even awkward as the result of uncomfortable vocal gestures (the acciaccaturas of bb. 3 and 10, the first placed on the second syllable of ‘Agnus’).

Andante ♩ = 84
dolcissimo

Soprano
Soli
Mezzo Soprano

A - gnus De - i, A - gnus De - i, qui tol - lis pec - ca - ta mun - di,
A - gnus De - i, A - gnus De - i, qui tol - lis pec - ca - ta mun - di,

8
S.
M.S.

do - na, do - na e - is, do - na e - is re - qui - em;
do - na, do - na e - is, do - na e - is re - qui - em;

pp

Example 3.1: Verdi, *Messa da Requiem*, *Agnus Dei*, bb. 1-13; reproduced from Giuseppe Verdi, *Messa da Requiem per l'anniversario della morte di Manzoni 22 maggio 1874*, ed. David Rosen (Chicago and Milan, 1990).

⁵⁰ Quoted from the translation of Guckeisen's article in Marcello Conati, *Interviews and Encounters with Verdi*, trans. Richard Stokes (London, 1984), 125-7, 126.

⁵¹ See Rosen, *Verdi*, 54-5.

The rest of the movement only adds to the complexity of the vocal/instrumental relationship. The first variation of the theme – the *Agnus Dei* can be described as a cantus firmus variation, in which the melody is repeated almost verbatim but with changing orchestral accompaniment – consists of a new statement of the melody by the chorus, clarinets, bassoons and strings in octave unison. The blend of sound is striking, in particular because of the registral restriction of the whole ensemble. Subsequent statements with the chorus harmonise the melody and gradually expand both the vocal-orchestral range and the number of instruments, thus bringing greater diversity. Overall, though, the sonority remains notably compact, creating a stark contrast with the soloists' statements. The latter passages are also underpinned by a clearer distinction between melody (singers) and accompaniment (instruments, both harmonising and weaving around the theme). The alternation of choral and soloistic passages, then, as well as Verdi's different treatment of the instrumental layer in the two situations, conjures distinct ideas of vocality. Most importantly, these vocal sonorities are given a new context by mixing a plain, delicate, almost religious 'Italian' melody with the resounding voice of a modern orchestra.

Verdi's debt towards instrumental idioms is even more apparent in some of the vocal writing of the *Offertorio*, for four soloists and orchestra. The movement comprises five sections organised according to an ABCBA' form, and is characterised by exceptionally dense motivic repetition. This is especially evident in section A, in which most of the musical material is derived from the *cantabile dolce* theme played early on by the cellos (bb. 13ff; see Example 3.2). The phrase is preceded by twelve bars of ascending or descending arpeggio figuration (for the same instruments) finished off by chromatic scales, with passages for solo wind at the end of each sub-phrase. The theme itself consists of the repetition of a four-bar motive punctuated each time by brief cadential statements by mezzo-soprano and tenor soloists. From the very beginning, the *Offertorio* establishes the vocal/instrumental relationship in equivocal terms: not only does the cello phrase have a markedly 'individual' character – it could well have been scored for a solo

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The musical score is for Verdi's *Messa da Requiem*, *Offertorio*, measures 9-25. It features the following parts:

- Fl. (Flute):** Measures 9-17, marked with a first finger (I) and a crescendo.
- Ob. (Oboe):** Measures 9-17, marked with a first finger (I) and a crescendo.
- Cl. in Sib. (Clarinet in B-flat):** Measures 9-17, marked with a first finger (I) and a crescendo.
- Mezzo Soprano:** Measures 18-25, singing "Do - mi - ne," with a *pp* (pianissimo) dynamic.
- Tenore (Tenor):** Measures 18-25, singing "Do - mi - ne," with a *pp* (pianissimo) dynamic.
- Vc. (Violoncello):** Measures 9-25, playing a melodic line with dynamics *ppp* (pianissimissimo), *cantabile dolce*, and *un poco marcate*.
- M.S. (Mezzo Soprano):** Measures 18-25, singing "Do - mi - ne Je - su Chri - ste, Je - su Chri - ste, Rex glo -" with dynamics *cresc.* (crescendo) and *f* (forte).
- T. (Tenore):** Measures 18-25, singing "Do - mi - ne Je - su Chri - ste, Je - su Chri - ste, Rex glo -" with dynamics *cresc.* (crescendo) and *f* (forte).
- Vc. (Violoncello):** Measures 18-25, playing a melodic line with dynamics *più marcate* and *f* (forte).

Example 3.2: Verdi, *Messa da Requiem*, *Offertorio*, bb. 9-25; reproduced from Giuseppe Verdi, *Messa da Requiem per l'anniversario della morte di Manzoni 22 maggio 1874*, ed. David Rosen (Chicago and Milan, 1990).

cello, as in the introduction to Philippe's aria in Act 4 of *Don Carlos*⁵² – but it is also rounded off by vocal remarks that, in the circumstances, carry instrumental connotations. When the melody is taken up by the soloists (bb. 31ff), the ambiguity of this apparent exchange of roles partly fades away; yet it soon reappears through other routes.

For one thing, Verdi's consistent use in A and A' of very limited musical material, elements of which generate moments of loosely imitative writing, means that different words will often have to be set to music with the same rhythmic

⁵² Further echoes of this aria could be seen in the three accented notes with acciaccaturas at bb. 29-30 (a recurrent element in *Don Carlos*, and Philippe's aria in particular) and in the bass entrance (recalling Philippe's voice) immediately afterwards.

features: through its pervasiveness, the cellos' lyrical motive requires adaptation of the varying prosodic qualities of the text to the 'same' music. This can only increase the sense of an uneasy integration of the musical and textual elements whenever trivial words such as the preposition *de* are set to the whole first bar of the theme (b. 39); or the same rhythmic element, such as the six quavers of the melody's second bar, generates different types of relationship with the word underlay (from one-syllable-per-note, as in most of b. 36, to one-syllable-per-six-notes, as at b. 74).⁵³ Put differently, it is as if (once again) Verdi conceived his melody less as a vocal than as an instrumental idea. All of this is made even more suggestive by such strange moments as the soprano's entry over an exceptionally long, *pp* e² (bb. 62ff). Above this note and further accompaniment by violins and violas, two solo violins play the first two bars of the melody three times (with a shift of key on the third one) before giving way to an evocative exchange of roles: the singer takes up the theme while the violins continue her long-held note (the protagonists finally being reunited through simultaneous statements of the melody). For a few seconds, vocality bows to instrumentality, the former constrained – like the soprano – to hold back in both dynamics and melodic invention while still contributing to the weave of the overall musical texture.⁵⁴

One further way of expanding the possibilities of the human voice emerges in the 'Requiem æternam' section of the final movement, the *Libera me* (bb. 132-70), a section scored for unaccompanied solo soprano and chorus.⁵⁵ Through the soloist's part, the beginning of this section suggests some of the considerations made above in relation to the soprano's long-held note in the *Offertorio*. In the *Libera me* case, the soloist enters on and prolongs for three beats a long f² played by a solo oboe and horn in the preceding bars – a gesture that composes a gliding

⁵³ The awkward relationship between words and music is also evident in Verdi's different distribution of the syllables of 'fidelium defunctorium' to the same music at bb. 36 and 203.

⁵⁴ As a result of the soprano's long-held note, one also struggles to grasp the word on which it is sung (*sed*, i.e. 'but'). This seems to inflict another blow to traditional vocality.

⁵⁵ The significance of these bars also derives from the *Requiem*'s compositional history. The *Libera me* passage (virtually unchanged in its 1869 and 1874 versions, except for a few minor revisions and the transposition from A minor to B-flat minor) provided the opening material for the *Requiem e Kyrie*, albeit with different scoring: the *Libera me* statement is *a cappella*, while the antiphon of the first movement is scored for strings and choral declamation; see David Rosen, 'La "Messa" a Rossini e il "Requiem" per Manzoni', in *Messa per Rossini: la storia, il testo, la musica*, ed. Michele Girardi and Pierluigi Petrobelli (Parma and Milan, 1988), 119-49.

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of instrumental into vocal sound. What comes next, though, is purely vocal discourse, in fact discourse of a type that seems both to invoke and call into question earlier traditions of sacred, *a cappella* music (see Example 3.3). The texture is prevalently homophonic, both in the four-part choral writing and – often, as well as increasingly as the music unfolds – in its relationship with the soloist. In this sense, the soprano part is constructed less as a ruling solo than as a voice indistinguishably fused with all the others, accordingly to the best sixteenth-century polyphonic tradition. At the same time, however, the soloist stands out as utterly independent from the choral mass. The soprano's range is such that it tends to

132 Andante ♩ = 80

Ob. I

Cor. in Mib. I

Soprano *ppp* *Voci sole* *espressivo*

Re - qui - em æ - - - - ter - nam do - na

Soprani *ppp*

Re - qui - em, re - qui - em æ - ter - nam do - na,

Contralti *ppp*

Re - qui - em, re - qui - em æ - ter - nam do - na,

Tenori *ppp*

Re - qui - em, re - qui - em æ - ter - nam do - na,

Bassi *ppp*

Re - qui - em, re - qui - em æ - ter - nam do - na,

Coro

139

S. e - is, do - na e - is, e - is, Do - mi - ne, do - na, do - na e - is, Do - mi -

S. do - na, do - na, do - na e - is, do - na e - is, do - na e - is,

C. do - na, do - na, do - na e - is, do - na e - is, do - na e - is,

T. do - na, do - na, do - na e - is, do - na e - is, do - na e - is,

B. do - na, do - na, do - na e - is, do - na e - is, do - na e - is,

Example 3.3: Verdi, *Messa da Requiem*, *Libera me*, bb. 132-43; reproduced from Giuseppe Verdi, *Messa da Requiem per l'anniversario della morte di Manzoni 22 maggio 1874*, ed. David Rosen (Chicago and Milan, 1990).

single out her voice from the harmonies underneath. Owing also to the timbral difference from the blended sound of the choir, the soprano translates into a solo statement supported by a harmonic weave of human voices.⁵⁶ Her vocality is constructed as a more ‘modern’, perhaps even more ‘operatic’, expression of individuality: an expression that establishes distance from the homogeneous textures of ancient polyphonic music and instead consigns all remaining musical sound to a soloist-centred – or at least soloist-related – discourse.

A loosely operatic or an unconventional religious quality is also revealed by the abundance of dynamic and expression markings in all parts (*f* to *pppp*; *dolcissimo*; *morendo*), as well as by the resonant indication *portate* for the soprano at bb. 148-49. Some of these prescriptions betray a forcing of the human voice out of its customary habits, into a domain of often unperformable, or at least obviously instrumental, effects (see for instance the *pppp* Verdi asks the soprano to produce at the very end on a high b²-flat). Above all, Verdi’s ‘modern’ take on the interweaving of the soprano with the other lines is accomplished by relying on the human voice in all layers of the music, the chorus gaining a role that would have more naturally belonged to instruments. This is *vocalità* – ‘modern’ *vocalità* – celebrated through unspoiled vocal sound; the music of the present refashioned and sacralised in echoes of ages past.

Progress and crisis

Early discourse about the *Requiem* reflected much of these seeming contradictions, drenched, as it was, in statements that claimed both the progressive and the conservative character of Verdi’s music. Far from merely encouraging nostalgic comparisons with an increasingly revered musical past, the *Requiem* invited attempts to foresee future musical developments. ‘Verdi is the personification of musical progress’, announced Galli in *Il secolo* the day after the *Requiem* premiere. A retrospective of the composer’s career, spanning over thirty years and culminating in religious composition, led the critic to identify in Verdi’s constant

⁵⁶ The texture of this passage is to some extent similar to that of the quartet for solo voices in Act 2 of *Luisa Miller*, although in the opera the supporting group is made up of three soloists (not the chorus) and the character of the music is markedly different.

artistic transformations some sort of natural law dictating musical and historical development. Plainchant was the voice of an ancient age, one by then far-off from modern days, and while it still survived in the church in traditional chants with a monumental status (such as the *Te Deum*), it should by no means impede the breakthroughs of modern composition.⁵⁷ A similar, if far more extended, retrospective reckoning of the history of music since the tenth century – starting with Guido d'Arezzo and closing with Verdi – had constituted the material of a book published by Galli a few years earlier. To the burning question of whether modern sacred music ought to be modelled on sixteenth-century works, Galli answered in the negative, arguing that musical progress should not be held back.⁵⁸

Further efforts to distance Verdi's *Requiem* from the fixity of old forms and styles came from such authoritative critics as Filippi and Pietro Cominazzi.

Praising Verdi's latest work, the former noted that, although

il tipo classico della musica religiosa, come esisteva molti secoli addietro, è certo ammirabile [...] non ha ragione di essere che a titolo di ammirabile, venerabile memoria. Per il canto fermo, per la musica calma, grave, impassibile, la quale non modula, e non comporta nemmeno la battuta, ci vuole una fede, oserei quasi dire un'esaltazione religiosa, che non sono più del nostro tempo.⁵⁹

[the classic type of religious music, as it existed years ago, is certainly admirable [...] it has no reason to exist but as an admirable, honourable memory. For plainchant, for that music which is calm, grave, impassive, which does not modulate and implies no measures, a faith, I would almost say, a religious exaltation is needed that no longer belongs to our time.]

Rather than clinging to outdated models, modern composers should seek to be 'bold innovators', as their predecessors had been.⁶⁰ Even a Verdi opponent such as Cominazzi, typically hostile to any anti-traditional move by the composer, criticised those who held that 'church music should obey the immutable laws of Catholicism, thus remaining as fixed as them'. True, Verdi had moved ahead too

⁵⁷ 'Verdi è la personificazione del progresso musicale [...] la musica antica altro non era che quella cui fu dato il nome di canto fermo; di essa vivono tuttora dei monumenti, primo per maestà l'inno di giubilo *Te Deum*': Galli, in *Il secolo*, 23 May 1874, 2.

⁵⁸ See Galli, *La musica ed i musicisti*, 45-6.

⁵⁹ Filippi, in *La perseveranza*, 23 May 1874, 1.

⁶⁰ 'La forma più elementare della musica da chiesa è il canto fermo: in confronto del canto fermo Palestrina è un audace novatore: e lo è Pergolese, col suo *Stabat Mater* drammatico, in confronto di Palestrina; e così via discendendo fino a Rossini, ed a Berlioz': Filippi, in *La perseveranza*, 28 May 1874, 1.

fast; yet the ‘sterile forms of the old masters’ should be abandoned, making room for innovation.⁶¹

Claims akin to these were voiced by others, and were by no means restricted to the Verdi debates. In two articles on Rossini published in the *Nuova antologia* in 1869 and 1870, Girolamo Alessandro Biaggi complained about one common opinion that urged modern religious music to follow the models of plainchant and Palestrina. This, the critic opined, is incompatible with artistic advance. ‘[W]ith regard to style, forms, voice-leading, harmony, counterpoint and all that constitutes its external manifestation and technical mastery, church music must be conceived and written according to the practice of its time’.⁶² In like fashion, Giuseppe Arrigo noted in 1875 the anachronism of Gregorian chant and ‘alla Palestrina’ compositions. ‘Everything has its own time’, he argued, and one needs to learn to ‘abandon all that is conventional and that belongs to an age that is past, that cannot come back’.⁶³ Indeed, during the second half of the nineteenth century, accounts of music history – and specifically sacred music history – were increasingly underpinned by the idea of an ascending sequence of technical developments whose ultimate goal coincided with the music of the present. Such a stance was not only in contrast to earlier trends (as exemplified, for instance, by

⁶¹ ‘Parve a giudici quanto competenti, altrettanto rigidi censori, che la musica da chiesa obbedire dovesse alle leggi immutabili del cattolicesimo e restasse immobile al pari di quello [...] Or bene: lasciamo le troppo sterili forme de’ vecchi maestri, ch  d’altra parte non giungeremmo mai ad agguagliarne la misteriosa significanza: progrediamo al postutto’: Pietro Cominazzi, in *La fama*, 26 May 1874, 82. Another commentator, writing for the *Gazzetta di Venezia*, maintained that ‘Il gigantesco successo di questo lavoro [il *Requiem* di Verdi] di inestimabile valore del pi  grande dei nostri maestri di musica d’oggi , non pu  a meno di far gettare uno sguardo retrospettivo sulla storia della musica sacra e lo si fa con grande compiacenza, perch  il progresso fu imponente e in buona parte devoluto al genio italiano’: quoted from *Il Requiem del maestro Giuseppe Verdi a Venezia*, 23-4.

⁶² ‘la musica da chiesa rispetto allo stile, alle forme, alla condotta, all’armonia, al contrappunto e a tutto ci , insomma, che costituisce la sua manifestazione esterna e il suo magistero tecnico, deve essere concepita e scritta secondo la pratica del giorno’: Biaggi, ‘Della vita e delle opere di Gioacchino Rossini’, *Nuova antologia di scienze, lettere ed arti*, 10/3 (1869), 637-47, 642; see also 640-1. See also Biaggi, ‘La musica religiosa e la *Petite Messe* del Rossini’, *Nuova antologia di scienze, lettere ed arti*, 14/7 (1870), 612-20, esp. 613-4.

⁶³ ‘Oggi tanto lo stile gregoriano che il palestriniano non hanno n  possono avere veruna attrattiva che valga ad innalzare l’anima nostra al Creatore, e non servirebbero allo scopo per cui si introdusse la musica in Chiesa. Ogni cosa ha il suo tempo. Non si vuol negare che lo studio dei classici antichi non sia una sicura guida a progredire; ma   altrettanto vero che   mestieri saper c rnere il vero e il buono, e tralasciare quanto di convenzionale si incontra e di relativo ad un tempo che pass , n  pu  pi  ritornare’: Giuseppe Arrigo, *L’organo nel santuario e la musica religiosa* (Alessandria, 1875), quoted from Rainoldi, *Sentieri della musica sacra*, 191.

Baini) advocating a return to a remote apex of musical composition, but also reflected shifting conceptions of history. Ever more teleologically-inflected and coloured by moral tensions and expectations, these resulted in a late-nineteenth-century explosion of narratives, both musical and historical, relentlessly articulating a story of progress and regeneration entwined with one of crisis and decline.⁶⁴

This is not to say that the nineteenth century's belief in the bourgeois value of progress implied a disregard of the past: quite the opposite. As the increasing rediscovery of old repertoires of both sacred and operatic Italian music shows, that past – whether represented by Palestrina, Cimarosa or any other old master – had never been so present. Rather, precisely because of their new proximity and nationalistically-inflected significance, Italian compositions from earlier periods were invested with a pseudo-sacred aura: they were reassuringly stable icons, as discussed in Chapter Two, to guide and inspire modern musicians; unfading models with a didactic, even moralising function. Their monumental status, though, came at a cost: it would since then belabour the discrepancy, as well as the mutual dependence, of – to borrow Reinhart Koselleck's terminology – 'spaces of experience' and 'horizons of expectation'; present pasts and colliding anticipations of the future.⁶⁵ The most obvious results of such a widening divide were a sense of nostalgia and widespread perceptions of crisis. '[A]s a historical emotion', Svetlana Boym has argued, nostalgia 'is a longing for that shrinking "space of experience" that no longer fits the new horizon of expectations. Nostalgic manifestations are side effects of the teleology of progress'.⁶⁶ Attached to the same incongruity – a consequence of the modern conception of linear, irreversible time – is also a sense of decay. As Dylan Trigg puts it, '[t]he ontological significance of decline exists in the loss of a world-view which no longer aligns with lived experience'; decay

⁶⁴ See Di Pasquale, 'Inventing Palestrina', and 'Immagini del Rinascimento', esp. 295-306 on Biaggi and his teleological views of music history.

⁶⁵ See Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, trans. Keith Tribe (Cambridge, MA, and London, 1985), 267-88.

⁶⁶ Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York, 2001), 10.

invariably ensues when the temporality of our present confronts us with an ‘imbalance between ideas and experience’.⁶⁷

Tropes of crisis and degeneration, as well as interlocking routes to material and moral betterment, were a shared area of debate within distinct national communities in Europe during the second half of the nineteenth century. The language and ideologies associated with such concepts cut across disciplines such as medicine, biology, politics, sociology and literature. As Daniel Pick has shown in his remarkable study of this topic, degenerative narratives need to be understood in close connection with burgeoning pleas for progress and modernisation – attitudes reflected scientifically in Darwin’s evolutionary theories.⁶⁸ Degeneration constituted less a subject for conceptual theorisation than a flexible term drawing attention to ‘recurrent and *shared* discursive tensions, continually inflected, specified, re-formulated in *different* social and political contexts’.⁶⁹ To put this another way, while crisis became increasingly studied as an empirical fact from a medical, anthropological, political point of view, its pervasiveness also betrays its constructed nature, its narrative dimension, its rhetorical undertones.

Post-Unification Italian culture was no stranger to cries against various kinds of weaknesses, decay and immorality; indeed, it was by its very nature dominated by over-arching anxiety and disillusionment. As Suzanne Stewart-Steinberg has asserted, ‘the formulation of an Italian national self was predicated on a language that posited marginalization and powerlessness as fundamental aspects of what it meant to be modern Italians’.⁷⁰ Crisis had, to some extent, an endemic quality: it was the means by which Italians habitually identified themselves; perhaps it was even an oblique expedient, a way of encouraging (and

⁶⁷ Dylan Trigg, *The Aesthetics of Decay: Nothingness, Nostalgia, and the Absence of Reason* (New York, 2009), 96 and 95.

⁶⁸ It is no coincidence that theorists of degeneration and atavism such as Cesare Lombroso and Max Nordau were also resolute positivists whose thought was shaped by Darwin’s theories. On the first, see Daniel Pick, *Faces of Degeneration: A European Disorder, c. 1848 – c. 1918* (Cambridge, 1993), 107-52; on the second, see George L. Mosse, introduction to Max Nordau, *Degeneration*, trans. of 2nd (1895) edn. (Lincoln, 1993), xiii-xxxvi.

⁶⁹ Pick, *Faces of Degeneration*, 106.

⁷⁰ Suzanne Stewart-Steinberg, *The Pinocchio Effect: On Making Italians, 1860-1920* (Chicago, 2007), 2.

imploing) the advent of European progress in order to replace Italy's traditional perceived backwardness.⁷¹

As will now be obvious, musical debates also participated in these wider trends. The *decadenza* of sacred Italian music was a common theme of late-nineteenth-century writings, its origin supposedly stemming from the gradual deviation of church composers from the *recta via* represented by medieval chant and Palestrina. Attitudes towards such models, however, were ambiguous, highlighting the inevitable degenerative processes set in motion by their acquired monumental status. *Canto fermo*, in particular, came to display all the hazards of its crystallised nature. Biaggi, for one, noted the futility of seeking to renew church music by way of exhuming the style of plainchant, since this 'had been corrupted during the centuries and one would have had to recover its pure, original form – which is impossible to do'.⁷² Even seemingly antithetical statements published in the pro-Church *Musica sacra* could be read as expressions of similar concerns. In an 1879 issue of the journal, Carlo Viganò defined the *canto fermo* as 'that collection of sacred melodies recorded by choral books with the aim of preserving them and prohibiting their alteration'. He did go on to add that, in his view, the adjective *fermo* indicated less the chant's 'slowness and gravity' than its 'stability' (a stability dictated by the same law which applied to 'sacred ceremonies, which are immutable').⁷³ Nevertheless, his need to stress this point – to summon up the materiality of seemingly enduring human artefacts as a warranty against forgetfulness and decay – suggests that plainchant was also perceived as subject to the effects of worldly time.

What is most disconcerting about such utterances is both their ubiquity and their routine application to varied musical genres. Such accounts, that is, are deeply

⁷¹ See Stewart-Steinberg, *The Pinocchio Effect*, 93. On Italians' *deprecatio temporum*, as linked to the crisis of the intellectuals following Unification, see Alberto Asor Rosa, *Storia d'Italia*, 4/2, *Dall'Unità ad oggi: la cultura* (Turin, 1975), 821-39.

⁷² 'il canto-fermo era stato corrotto nei secoli e bisognava risalire alla sua forma pura e originale – cosa impossibile da farsi': Biaggi, 'La musica religiosa', 614.

⁷³ 'quella raccolta di sacre melodie registrate nei libri corali con precetto di conservarle e con proibizione di alterarle [...] Da tutti vien chiamato *fermo* questo canto per la sua lentezza e gravità. A me sembra che il medesimo attributo indichi meglio la sua stabilità [...] Con grande soddisfazione quindi osservo che si comincia a chiamarlo *canto liturgico*, volendo dire, che esso è soggetto alla legge delle cerimonie sacre, le quali sono immutabili': Carlo Viganò, *Memoria intorno al canto fermo*, quoted from *Musica sacra*, May 1879, 18.

redolent of Italy's oft-asserted 'operatic crisis' around 1860; indeed, they also speak of rhetorical inflation. What is more, the language used to describe the shortcomings of modern compositions, whether sacred or operatic, was at times surprisingly similar. In an examination of the current health of Gregorian chant and sacred music, priest Luigi Bianchi started out by acknowledging their worrying decadence.⁷⁴ Later on, listing the deficiencies of modern religious music, he provided an inventory of what turned out to be the perceived negative qualities of contemporary Italian opera: from a style that 'often sacrifices melody for obscure harmonic artifice, so-called *alla tedesca*', to an 'entirely profane style [...] that is purely instrumental'; from the lack of respect for the meaning and understanding of the text, to the 'roar' caused by 'a stormy sea of deafening instruments'. As if the allusions to contemporary operatic discourse were not enough, Bianchi took leave of his cataloguing impulse via a reference to the '*musica enigmatica*, so-called *dell'avvenire*'. Posterity, he said, would be its judge.⁷⁵

As I have tried to show, language provided prolific territory in which remarks about this or that composition or musical genre could (and did) take on wider resonances: resonances that would impinge on Italians' musical and other self-image. Rhetorical and linguistic similarities bridging late-nineteenth-century discussions of sacred and operatic music should give us pause: at the least, they might encourage a more flexible and porous relationship between the two genres, and perhaps also make us wary of the idea of the old and the new as mutually exclusive. To return once again to the *Requiem* debates, we may now want to reread that early penchant for Verdi's barest, instrumentally-inflected vocal writing as a symptom of wider trends in perceptions of Italian music: as a sign that seemingly inward-looking, old fogey discussions about church composition could also – via Verdi's mediating presence – encompass refreshing visions of Italian

⁷⁴ 'È oramai comune il giudizio che il canto ecclesiastico e la Musica sacra alla Chiesa sieno in decadenza': Luigi Bianchi, *Una gloria dell'arte italiana, ossia lo studio del canto ecclesiastico riportato a chiara intelligenza di tutti...* (Pisa, 1877), 5.

⁷⁵ 'stile secco e disadorno che [...] sacrifica spesso la melodia ad un male inteso artificio armonico, o, come dicono alla tedesca'; 'stile del tutto profano [...] puramente strumentale in cambio della melodia sacra e dell'armonia calma e celeste'; 'per nulla intese, o considerate le dette parole, servono invece come di zavorra'; 'un mare tempestoso di assordanti strumenti da immelensire gli ascoltanti, con un indefinito e indefinibile frastuono'; 'Della musica enigmatica che dicono dell'avvenire, giudicheranno i posteri': Bianchi, *Una gloria dell'arte italiana*, 22-4.

opera. This would not only allow us to reconsider, at least from a musical perspective, some of the traditional narratives and binary oppositions underlying many scholarly accounts of nineteenth-century *Kulturkämpfe* and processes of secularisation (the most trodden interpretative route flowing invariably from the sacred to the secular, from tradition to modernity, from the Church to the nation-state);⁷⁶ it would also offer us a chance to recall that crisis always comes with a promise of alternatives, an anticipation of change.⁷⁷ The past, when we gently accept it into our presents, can unveil its benign potential to generate things ever new.

Pursuing morals

Si aprono nuove pagine del libro del mondo, e come l'arcipelago indiano vide uscire un giorno, dalla schiuma delle sue onde immacolate, la sua Venere spirituale – dall'ampio mare dello scetticismo dominante, sorge una nuova figura che si atteggia ostile alla rivelazione. La terra ha sete di verità morali, più che di verità teologiche; l'arte la soccorre.⁷⁸

[New pages from the book of the world are being unfolded, and as the Indian archipelago once saw its spiritual Venus arise from the foam of its immaculate sea, a new figure hostile to revelation today emerges from the vast ocean of pervading scepticism. The world is thirsty for moral truths rather than theological ones; art comes to the rescue.]

This tale of attitudes surrounding Verdi's *Requiem* lends itself to one further interpretative move: addressing the work's loosely political resonances in moral terms. The issue of morality has remained mostly latent up to this point, yet it is implicitly connected to late-nineteenth-century discourses of progress and degeneration, and became central to Italian musical and other debates after Unification. Tropes of degeneracy and degradation, ascribed to decades of foreign

⁷⁶ For a general overview of the literature on and approaches to secularisation, see Hugh McLeod's introduction to his *Secularisation in Western Europe, 1848-1914* (New York, 2000), 1-30. For insightful revisions of the traditional views, see Austen Ivereigh, 'The Politics of Religion in an Age of Revival', and Margaret Lavinia Anderson, 'The Divisions of the Pope: the Catholic Revival and Europe's Transition to Democracy', in *The Politics of Religion in an Age of Revival: Studies in Nineteenth-Century Europe and Latin America*, ed. Austen Ivereigh (London, 2000), 1-21 and 22-42; and Christopher Clark, 'The New Catholicism and the European Culture Wars', in *Culture Wars: Secular-Catholic Conflict in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, ed. Christopher Clark and Wolfram Kaiser (Cambridge, 2005), 11-46.

⁷⁷ On the Greeks' use of the term 'crisis', which implied the idea of making a choice or decision, see Reinhart Koselleck, 'Crisis', trans. Michaela W. Richter, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 67/2 (2006), 357-400, esp. 358-61. On the relationship between progress and crisis in Walter Benjamin's and Benedetto Croce's thought, see Axel Körner, 'The Experience of Time as Crisis. On Croce's and Benjamin's Concepts of History', *Intellectual History Review*, 21/2 (2011), 151-69.

⁷⁸ E. Spagnolo, in *Gazzetta di Milano*, 26 May 1874, 1.

oppression in the various pre-Unification states, had characterised the period leading up to independence in 1861. During that time, political struggle against the peninsula's old rulers had been equated with the nation's moral, social and artistic regeneration. After the completion of the Risorgimento project, however, political, social and financial problems caused those ideals to be supplanted by an even greater sense of moral dissolution.⁷⁹ Michele Lessona's book *Volere è potere* (1869), modelled on Samuel Smiles's *Self-Help* (1859), was only one of several attempts to foster the overcoming of adversities of various kinds through knowledge of exemplary Italian lives (Verdi's among them).⁸⁰ In the circumstances, and according to earlier, Mazzinian views, artistic progress was deemed a tool for reinvigorating the health of the nation, with music making a significant contribution.

The quotation that begins this final section is taken from a review published in the *Gazzetta di Milano* a few days after the *Requiem* premiere. It posits in powerful terms the uplifting role ascribed to musical art. One can hear echoes of Mazzini's unshakable faith in music's 'higher destinies, [its] new and more solemn mission';⁸¹ the same moral tension that runs through Francesco De Sanctis's *Storia della letteratura italiana* (1871), and its vision of a worldly religion of morals.⁸² The edifying quality of music was a topos of nineteenth-century writings, one that originated around the middle of the previous century and is usually connected with the rise of the bourgeoisie. Late-nineteenth-century debates, such as those

⁷⁹ For an insightful analysis of tropes of degeneration during the Risorgimento, and their connection to later nineteenth-century nationalistic discourse, see Silvana Patriarca, 'Indolence and Regeneration: Tropes and Tensions of Risorgimento Patriotism', *American Historical Review*, 110/2 (2005), 380-408, and her *Italian Vices: Nation and Character from the Risorgimento to the Republic* (Cambridge, 2010), 20-50. For a study of the ideology of nostalgia in late-nineteenth-century Italy, see Richard Drake, *Byzantium for Rome: The Politics of Nostalgia in Umbertian Italy, 1878-1900* (Chapel Hill, 1980).

⁸⁰ Michele Lessona, *Volere è potere* (Florence, 1869); Samuel Smiles's *Self-Help: With Illustrations of Character, Conduct and Perseverance* (London, 1859) was translated into Italian by Gustavo Strafforello in 1865, with the title *Chi si aiuta Dio l'aiuta*.

⁸¹ 'in questa [musica] dei nostri giorni che noi condanniamo, s'agita non pertanto tale un fermento di vita che preannuncia nuovi destini, nuovo sviluppo, nuova e più solenne missione': Mazzini, *Filosofia*, in *Filosofia della musica, e estetica*, 48. On Mazzini's views about music's social regenerative power, see also the forward by Lawrence Kramer and the introduction by Franco Sciannameo to *Giuseppe Mazzini's Philosophy of Music (1836): Envisioning a Social Opera*, trans. E. A. V. (1867), ed. and annotated Franco Sciannameo (Lewiston, Queenston and Lampeter, 2004).

⁸² See Maurizio Viroli, *As if God Existed: Religion and Liberty in the History of Italy*, trans. Alberto Nones (Princeton and Oxford, 2012), 155.

fomented by the Cecilian movement, about the style and function of religious compositions are packed with instructive undertones, ones that, in this case, emanated from Church agendas. But such sacred works as Rossini's *Petite messe* and Verdi's *Requiem* may have reverberated with wider, secular feelings about the formative possibilities of musical education and choral singing.⁸³

A few months after the first Milanese performances of the *Requiem*, a series of articles was published in Ricordi's *Gazzetta musicale* focusing on the importance of musical education in the primary school curriculum, as well as of the creation of choral societies for wider audiences. The articles were signed by composer and choral professor Giulio Roberti, and were the proceedings of the Accademia of the Istituto musicale in Florence. Besides reiterating common claims about the need to follow the great models of the past, Roberti drew on writings by Florentine musicologist Leto Puliti concerning the moralising effects of music. Music, Puliti wrote, could be 'supremely useful [...] in aid of education, upbringing, and above all as an instrument of morality in the current and future life of the people'; '[m]usical education [...] must be thought of as a tool for teaching order and discipline, since its primary purpose is to contribute to the moral, intellectual and physical education of the pupils'.⁸⁴ Not all those who were to study choral music, Roberti commented, would be impelled by their religious beliefs; but they would all be aware and proud of their greater mission.⁸⁵ Similar convictions about the 'civilising' effects of choral music were expressed by Giovanni Varisco, professor of singing and author of didactic textbooks in Milan. His *Metodo di canto corale* once again demonstrated how tightly bound up aesthetic and political

⁸³ For some nineteenth-century thoughts on the relationship between music and morals, see also some of John Ruskin's writings; for instance, his 'On the Relation of National Ethics to National Arts', extracts of which are rept. in *Music Education: Source Readings from Ancient Greece to Today*, ed. Michael L. Mark (New York and London, 2008), 47-9, and *Ruskin on Music*, ed. Augusta Mary Wakefield (Orpington, 1894), 112-42.

⁸⁴ 'utilità massima che la musica può presentare come ausiliatrice della istruzione, della educazione, e soprattutto come mezzo di moralità nella vita presente e avvenire del popolo'; 'L'insegnamento musicale [...] deve essere considerato elemento d'ordine e di disciplina, essendo suo scopo precipuo quello di servire come mezzo ausiliare per la educazione morale, intellettuale e fisica degli alunni': Leto Puliti, quoted by Giulio Roberti, in *GMM*, 2 August 1874, 250. This was one in a series of articles titled 'Il canto corale', which followed with the issues of 9, 23 and 30 August.

⁸⁵ 'Dei componenti le associazioni corali, pochi andranno a cantare in chiesa per spirito di religione, molti per amore dell'arte, moltissimi per imitazione e per moda, ma tutti vi andranno per entusiasmo, e, penetrati della nobiltà della loro missione, non potranno non tenervi un contegno decoroso': Roberti, in *GMM*, 23 August 1874, 275.

considerations were in Italy (and elsewhere) at the time.⁸⁶ Such statements also point to the fact that, pace the long-assumed impermeability of secular and sacred domains, fluxes between the two were indeed possible, music offering itself – amidst rising tides of decline and degeneration – as a medium of salvation.⁸⁷

It is along these lines – lines coloured with ideas of moral uplift, and evoking different political tints to those hitherto pursued in accounts of Verdi's piece – that I want to end my *Requiem* voyage. Verdi's brain-teasing choral movements could hardly have lent themselves for wide-ranging educative purposes.⁸⁸ The work's premiere, nevertheless, and to some extent its later performances, still endorsed the secular yet sacredly-tinged moral conquests of their time. Extreme contrapuntal complexity and massive deployment of choral and orchestral forces required a valiant leader able to master multi-level centrifugal drives. Through his repeated appearance as a 'calm', 'dignified', disciplined conductor, Verdi offered himself as such a reassuring presence, both at the premiere and when he toured with the work so assiduously in subsequent years. His 'powerful arm' and 'magic baton' were able to impose a single will onto hundreds of performers and spellbind thousands in the audience, as though they belonged to a 'divine entity'. Verdi's scrupulousness, composure and self-control resulted not only in a spectacular fusion of vocal and instrumental sounds – an element often remarked on by nineteenth-century critics – but also in a contagious confidence and

⁸⁶ 'Lo studio del Canto corale impartito nell'età giovanile servirà ad imprimere maggiormente nei fanciulli col mezzo di *canzoni, melodie e cori*, quei sani principi di morale – indispensabili per formare buoni ed onesti cittadini. – Così, al posto delle oscene canzoni, che sono il disonore di quanti amano il decoro del paese nostro, perché nucono [*sic*] alla moralità ed al buon costume sostituiremo il canto educativo il quale: gentili renderà gli animi colle sue dolci e sante emozioni': Giovanni Varisco, *Metodo di canto corale per imitazione e corso di lezioni teorico-pratiche* (Milan, 1882), vi. For more on the educational role of choral singing and the establishment of popular schools of music in Milan from the 1860s, see Marina Vaccarini Gallarani, 'Aspetti e problemi della didattica musicale a Milano nell'ultimo ventennio dell'Ottocento', in *Milano musicale*, 351-71, esp. 360-5. For the German context, see James Garratt, *Music, Culture and Social Reform in the Age of Wagner* (Cambridge, 2010), and Barbara Eichner, *History in Mighty Sounds: Musical Constructions of German National Identity, 1848-1914* (Woodbridge, 2012).

⁸⁷ For more on the diffusion of choral societies and attempts at encouraging choral singing in various Italian cities at the time, see Irene Piazzoni, *Spettacolo, istituzioni e società nell'Italia postunitaria (1860-1882)* (Rome, 2001), esp. 317-24.

⁸⁸ The choruses of the 1874, as well as subsequent, Milan performances did, however, include, alongside professional singers, students from the Milan conservatory and other music schools and choral societies: see Filippi, in *La perseveranza*, 23 and 28 May 1874, 2 and 2; Spagnolo, in *Gazzetta di Milano*, 26 May 1874, 2; and the official poster advertising the 1883 performance at La Scala, rept. in *Giuseppe Verdi: 'Messa da Requiem'*, ed. Giovanni Gavazzeni (Bologna, 2008), 63.

sense of unity that would, optimistically, have positive effects on other aspects of Italians' lives.⁸⁹ The noble austerity of the San Marco ceremony, perhaps even the rigour imposed by the liturgical framework onto a free unfolding of Verdi's sonorous, *puissant* music, constituted further metaphors for some of the virtues the 'depraved' Italian people was lacking.⁹⁰ At the same time, the sharp contrast between the Catholic rites' invariable stillness and Verdi's progressive music indicated history's and humankind's motion forwards.

Verdi may well have failed, during the poet's lifetime and immediate afterlife, to tie his name to that of Manzoni. The two men had few occasions to meet, and – as mentioned much earlier in this chapter – the great man of letters hardly featured in early accounts of 'his' *Requiem*. Yet they would both become paternal figures for the young Italian nation, their artistic output and their moral and intellectual rigour retaining their hortatory force to the present day. What is more, Verdi's and Manzoni's marked differences in matters of religious belief, superseded by mutual esteem and by a shared faith in art's power to effect change, invite us to muse on one last unexpected proximity. They provide an evocative metaphor for those encrusted boundaries – between the old and the new, the sacred and the secular, progress and crisis – that through the *Requiem* early debates have revealed all their precariousness and persistent permeability. When it comes to narrating identities, whether individual or communal, whether our past or our

⁸⁹ 'braccio poderoso': *La perseveranza*, 1 July 1879, 2. 'Verdi che colla sua bacchetta da negromante domina, giganteggiando, sopra una folla di cantori e sonatori, ed impone la sua volontà ed il suo fascino a cinquemila o seimila spettatori, è quasi una divinità': *La Lombardia*, 26 May 1874, 2. 'Verdi è un capo d'orchestra modello, freddo, corretto, *tout d'un pièce* [sic], egli domina gli esecutori, li possiede, li dirige con sicurezza tanto più rimarchevole quanto minor sforzo essa pare che costi. Per lo più, un semplice cenno del capo gli basta: talvolta batte il piede per accentuare le misure, oppure lascia il suo posto, per dirigere gli istrumenti o le masse corali delle ultime file dell'orchestra, che isfuggono al suo colpo d'occhio': *Figaro*, trans. in and quoted from *Il pungolo*, 11 June 1874, 3. '[Verdi] mostravasi calmo, dignitoso, ma tuttavia colla potenza dello sguardo esercitava un fascino possente sopra la grande massa degli esecutori, i quali ad un suo piccolo cenno tramutavano istantaneamente le più forti esplosioni di sonorità in un *pianissimo* quasi impercettibile': Galli, in *Il secolo*, 23 May 1874, 3. 'Il maestro, i cantanti e le masse si sarebbero detti un essere solo, tanto pronto ed immediato era il volere che li univa insieme. Il genio di Verdi pareva alitasse su gli esecutori, che tutti li animasse di uno stesso pensiero, che a tutti infondesse qualche cosa della sua potenza': *Frustra teatrale*, 31 May 1874, 1. 'dominati dalla magica bacchetta di Verdi quegli esecutori sembravano uno solo, tanto era l'insieme, la pastosità, il colorito': *Frustra teatrale*, 9 July 1879, 1.

⁹⁰ For the aspect of the church and the performers at the premiere, see *La perseveranza*, 21 May 1874, 2; *Il secolo*, 22 May 1874, 2; *Il pungolo*, 23 May 1874 (morning issue), 2; and *La Lombardia*, 26 May 1874, 2.

present ones, differences seem to inflate; but they often do so deceptively. I like to think that the two men's symbolic encounter – this nineteenth-century meeting of moralist minds – would one day come to resound, bridging over one final, temporal divide, in the pre-World-War-II profession of faith of liberal-socialist philosopher Guido Calogero:

Del resto, anche l'uomo che non crede in Dio sente poi la sua morale come una religione, per quanto non ami abusar troppo di questo termine. La sente come una religione, perché la sente come qualcosa su cui è pronto a discutere, ma con la certezza che nessuno più lo convertirà. È ormai invecchiato in quella fede; ha parlato con tanti uomini; ha messo le sue idee a ogni rischio e a ogni paragone. Sa bene che la sua forza di persuasione è scarsa, che i suoi argomenti vanno di continuo rinnovati, che da ogni interlocutore egli ha da imparare qualche cosa. Ma ciò non tocca più la fermezza della sua fede. In questo senso, egli appartiene a una chiesa che non ammette tradimento di chierici. Lavorare per questa chiesa, favorire l'incremento dei suoi fedeli, è il più adeguato mestiere dell'uomo. In questo lavoro, è il pregio e il prezzo della sua intera esistenza.⁹¹

[After all, the man who does not believe in God also feels that his morality is like a religion, although he does not like to abuse this term. He feels it is some sort of religion, for it is something he is ready to discuss, but with the certainty that no one will convert him. He has grown old with that faith; he has spoken with many people; he has put his ideas to all tests and comparisons. He knows well that his force of persuasion is meagre, that his arguments should always be renewed, and that he has something to learn from each and every interlocutor. But all this no longer affects the firmness of his faith. In this sense, he belongs to a church that admits of no betrayal on the part of its clerics. To work for this church, to promote the increment of its believers – this is the most proper job for a man. In this job lay the worth and value of his whole existence.]

⁹¹ Guido Calogero, *La scuola dell'uomo* (Florence, 1939), 257-8; English translation of this passage quoted from Viroli, *As if God Existed*, epigraph.

CHAPTER FOUR

Simon Boccanegra, the 1881 Exhibition and the Operatic Museum

The date belongs to the photograph: not because it denotes a style (this does not concern me), but because it makes me lift my head, allows me to compute life, death, the inexorable extinction of the generations [...] I am the reference of every photograph.¹

Roland Barthes, 1980

The question of the archive is not, we repeat, a question of the past [...] It is a question of the future, the question of the future itself, the question of a response, of a promise and of a responsibility for tomorrow.²

Jacques Derrida, 1995

Nelle gallerie dei giardini pubblici non può star tutto, perciò Milano tutta quanta sarà un'Esposizione. Apriremo i musei, le gallerie pubbliche e private, invaderemo anche le chiese per andarvi a sentire i nostri organi migliori; quanto alla musica teatrale, che non può trovare il suo posto nelle gallerie del lavoro, la sua splendida galleria ce l'abbiamo; si chiama la *Scala*, ed è una galleria di lavoro che farà sbalordire. Faremo sentire agli stranieri che oltre il sommo Verdi che essi ammirano quanto noi, abbiamo dei maestri che non fanno da burla – metteremo loro innanzi alcune delle opere meglio riuscite degli ultimi tempi, di quelle che richiedano il concorso di tutte le forze peregrine della *Scala*, cioè dei cori impareggiabili, dell'orchestra insuperata. Sarà l'Esposizione del *teatro musicale italiano*.³

[Not everything will fit in the *Giardini pubblici* galleries, so the whole of Milan will be an Exhibition. We will open the museums, the public and private galleries, we will also invade the churches to go and listen to our best organs; as for operatic music, which cannot be accommodated within the work galleries, we already have a wonderful gallery; it is called *Scala*, and it is a work gallery that will astound. We will make foreigners realise that besides the great Verdi, whom they admire as much as we do, we have masters that should not be trifled with; we will present them with some of the best operas written in recent times, those operas that require the coming together of all the exceptional masses of La *Scala*, which is to say its incomparable choruses, its unequalled orchestra. It will be the Exhibition of *Italian music theatre*.]

Thus the anonymous critic of the *Gazzetta musicale di Milano*, announcing what he deemed the most appropriate operatic counterpart to Milan's 1881 starring event:

¹ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York, 1981), 84.

² Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago and London, 1996), 36.

³ *GMM*, 18 September 1881, 337.

the National Exhibition of Industry and Art. The City as Exhibition (as well as the Exhibition as City), and the Opera-House as Museum or Gallery for display of timeless musical works: these were metaphors by and large established in late-nineteenth-century Western European culture;⁴ tropes abundantly encountered, in more or less explicit formulations, in 1881 Milanese discourse. The author of the *Gazzetta* article, writing in September of that year, well into the Exhibition season (which ran from 5 May to 1 November), not only rehearses accepted notions of a primarily repertory-based operatic culture; he also raises concerns that swamped the local press during the weeks that preceded and coincided with the Exhibition.

Although couched in the future tense, the passage is an outburst of exasperation over the organisational failures that affected La Scala's 1881 programme. Many hoped that visitors to Milan from other Italian and foreign cities would be welcomed by a generous supply of operatic spectacle. In the Exhibition year, it was hoped, Milan's foremost opera-house would put on an exemplary display of '*old masterpieces*' – 'the most appropriate way', one critic explained, 'of celebrating [Italians'] musical glories before an audience of citizens from all over Italy'.⁵ However, a disappointing revival of Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, which coincided roughly with the opening of the Exhibition, was only the first of several factors that would cause discontent among Milanese critics (and presumably audiences) in subsequent weeks. Leone Fortis lamented that the municipality and the entertainments commission (*commissione per gli spettacoli*) did not make arrangements for a monumental, historically overarching La Scala season: a season in which should appear 'all those great masters in whose works is condensed the history of the musical art of recent times: Rossini, Bellini, Donizetti, Verdi – arriving at our contemporaries, before giving a place to Ponchielli, Boito, Marchetti – and to some of the young composers from whom we have so great expectations – Catalani, for instance, Smareglia or Auteri'.⁶ A far-reaching programme of this

⁴ On the former metaphor, see Alexander C. T. Geppert, 'Luoghi, città, prospettive: le esposizioni e l'urbanistica *fin-de-siècle*', *Memoria e ricerca. Rivista di storia contemporanea*, 12 (2003), 115-36.

⁵ '[La riproduzione di *vecchi capolavori*] era il mezzo più degno per celebrare le nostre glorie musicali innanzi a un pubblico, formato dei cittadini di tutta Italia': *Il teatro illustrato*, February 1881, 21.

⁶ 'E quindi formare con gran cura il programma degli spettacoli di opera – in modo che vi figurassero tutti quei grandi maestri in cui si riassume la storia dell'arte musicale in questi ultimi

kind – elsewhere envisioned as a catalogue of performances that would ‘summarise the history of La Scala by reproducing the main masterpieces composed for that stage in [the nineteenth] century’ – would convey a sense of Italy’s unending musical progress; it would function in like fashion as the compression of space and time engendered by the orderly gathering of objects in the Exhibition apparatus.⁷

Yet no such grand operatic plans materialised, possibly for a variety of reasons.⁸ Critics’ encyclopaedic preoccupations, which (as we shall see) closely echoed the striving for explanatory exhaustiveness evinced by journalistic accounts of the Exhibition, were not to tinge the opera programme of the theatre. La Scala’s 1881 season relied extensively on old (rather than new) operas, thus following a peculiar trajectory for Italian musical modernity; but its blockbusters during or immediately before the Exhibition were two compositions – Verdi’s *Simon Boccanegra* and Boito’s *Mefistofele* – both of which had years before resoundingly failed in Milan, and that now appeared again in revised versions.⁹ There was little else in the 1881 season, perhaps only a few performances of *Ernani* (and the *furor* caused by Luigi Manzotti’s ballet *Excelsior*), that was reckoned suitable to the marketing operations spurred on by the Exhibition year.¹⁰

tempi: Rossini, Bellini, Donizetti, Verdi – arrivare sino ai contemporanei, e quindi dare un posto nel programma a Ponchielli, a Boito, a Marchetti – e uno a qualcuno dei giovani da cui si spera molto – il Catalani, per esempio, lo Smareglia, l’Auteri’: Dottor Verità [Leone Fortis], in *Il pungolo*, 2-3 May 1881, 3.

⁷ ‘Da prima si era fatto cenno di un progetto di molto difficile, e forse impossibile esecuzione. Si proponeva, cioè, di riassumere, in un corso di rappresentazioni, la storia gloriosa di quelle scene, riproducendo i principali capolavori scritti per la Scala nel nostro secolo’: F[rancesco Flores] D’Arcais, ‘Rassegna musicale’, *Nuova antologia di scienze, lettere ed arti*, 16/12 (1881), 695-704, 695.

⁸ According to D’Arcais, this was because ‘mancano le tradizioni per tutto ciò che riguarda l’interpretazione delle opere di data non recente [...] In Italia, e precisamente alla Scala, non sarebbe possibile neanche la riproduzione cronologica delle opere di Verdi, perché per alcune di esse non si troverebbero i cantanti adatti’: D’Arcais, ‘Rassegna musicale’, 695-6. According to Fortis, the fault was of the municipality and the entertainments commission, who did not take enough interest in overseeing La Scala’s opera programme; see Fortis, in *Il pungolo*, 2-3 May 1881, 3.

⁹ For a reading of *Simon Boccanegra*’s ‘spectral historicity’ in relation to La Scala’s 1881 historicist opera season, see Alessandra Campana, ‘Milan 1881: *Simon Boccanegra* and the specters of history’, in Campana, *Opera and Modern Spectatorship in Late-Nineteenth-Century Italy* (Cambridge, forthcoming 2014). My thanks to Prof Campana for sharing an early draft of her chapter with me.

¹⁰ In its first year, *Excelsior* was performed over 100 times at La Scala alone; on Manzotti’s ballet, see the collection of essays in ‘*Excelsior*’: *Documents and Essays*, ed. Flavia Pappacena (Rome, 2000).

Precisely this paucity of new compositions, and to some extent the failure of some revivals, nevertheless yielded enthralling consequences for what proved to be the most pressing concerns of Milanese critics. Their preoccupations were as much with dissecting the works in question – particularly Verdi's and Boito's compositions, which had undergone revision in both the music and the libretto – as with reporting on their performance history, by reassembling memories of bygone stage events. If attempts to adumbrate Italy's operatic progress and the 'new' were in operation here, they were accomplished by unearthing and textualising the national past as embodied both by works and by performances.

It is with this dichotomy in mind – the one between works and performances – and without losing sight of its nexus with contemporary attitudes to time, that I wish to address a few examples of 1881 Milanese opera criticism, before considering some aspects of the language of contemporary (Italian) staging manuals. My aim is to raise a number of questions, both historical and historiographical: about the status of opera performances (as opposed, as well as in relation, to the 'works themselves') in the late-nineteenth-century Italian imagination; about the roots of historical modes of writing on both operatic works and their stagings in contemporary apprehensions about preserving the present as well as recuperating the past; and, finally, about the role played both by compositions and by performances in the interpretative framework provided by the lately influential notion of the Operatic Museum.

What has traditionally been understood to form the collections of nineteenth-century musical imaginary museums are composers' works – their increasingly fetishised, timeless masterpieces. The museum metaphor has famously been applied first and foremost to instrumental music, a tradition in which Lydia Goehr has identified a turning point around 1800, after which the work-concept assumed its central regulative function in Western musical culture.¹¹ Opera was somewhat sluggish in this respect. However, recent accounts of nineteenth-century

¹¹ See Lydia Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works: An Essay in the Philosophy of Music* (Oxford, 2007 [1992]).

operatic milieux (mostly London and Paris) have also endorsed the idea of an increasingly work-centred operatic culture.¹²

Such a culture was partly the result of the formation of the repertory, in Italy starting with Rossini. Opera, even (*pace* Carl Dahlhaus) Italian opera, gradually ceased to be understood in terms of performance events and became addressed in terms of durable, re-enactable works – ones suitable to be scrutinised and “owned” discursively’, as Emanuele Senici has put it, in ever more accurate critical accounts.¹³ It was around a relatively small cluster of works that modern opera criticism came to be developed, supported, in Italy from the 1820s, by the growing circulation of complete vocal scores. This circulation also led, particularly from the 1850s, to proto-modern examples of music analysis – examinations of textual aspects of the works.¹⁴ True, some recent writers have called for alternative stories; Jennifer Hall-Witt has argued that early nineteenth-century London was a melting pot in which different traditions of and stances to opera coexisted, ones making for a twofold understanding of this genre as based either on works or on events (depending on the type of operas performed, the location and the audience).¹⁵ With few exceptions, though, recent scholarly accounts have tended to portray the nineteenth-century Operatic Museum as inhabited by compositions, and thus directly or indirectly to endorse that century’s growing perception of operatic

¹² See, for instance, Emanuele Senici, “‘Adapted to the Modern Stage’: *La clemenza di Tito* in London’, *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 7/1 (1995), 1-22; Rachel Cowgill, ‘Mozart Productions and the Emergence of *Werktreue* at London’s Italian Opera House, 1780-1830’, in *Operatic Migrations: Transforming Works and Crossing Boundaries*, ed. Roberta Montemorra Marvin and Downing Thomas (Aldershot, 2006), 145-86; and William Gibbons, *Building the Operatic Museum: Eighteenth-Century Opera in Fin-de-Siècle Paris* (Rochester, 2013).

¹³ Senici has also shown, however, that well before the Rossini era, a new type of opera criticism (which he calls ‘modern’) developed in Milan, as the result of an increasing separation between the sphere of the ‘aesthetic’ and that of the ‘political’ from around 1804. Opera reviews became more work-centred (previously being mostly performance-oriented), insofar as works provided better material for critical scrutiny, and thus for exercising criticism in a sphere (the aesthetic one) in which this kind of intervention was admitted; see Senici’s paper presented at the conference ‘Italian Opera and Urban Culture, 1810-1870’, Berkeley, November 2011. Dahlhaus makes the famous distinction between two nineteenth-century ‘twin styles’ (Beethoven vs Rossini; German instrumental music vs Italian opera; work vs event) in his *Nineteenth-Century Music*, trans. J. Bradford Robinson (Berkeley, 1989), 8-15.

¹⁴ Ricordi acquired the right to publish complete vocal scores in 1823; until then, the publisher could print only excerpts; see Philip Gossett, ‘The Ricordi Numerical Catalogue: A Background’, *Notes*, 42/1 (1985), 22-8, here 25.

¹⁵ See Jennifer Hall-Witt, *Fashionable Acts: Opera and Elite Culture in London, 1780-1880* (Durham, 2007).

works and performances as separate things – ones defined by their opposite (durable vs passing) temporal qualities.¹⁶

In this chapter, I wish to revisit some of these views, and make a gesture towards an alternative picture. I want to ask whether performances might too have become occasionally subsumed, under the spell of the late-nineteenth-century historical imagination, into lasting, revisitable repertoires of some kind. I will raise the question of whether the writing practices of contemporary Italian music critics and practitioners may draw attention as much to works' and performances' mutual estrangement, as to efforts to integrate their characteristic qualities. In all this, Verdi's *Simon Boccanegra* will have a mostly pragmatic function, informing my argument throughout. The revised work made its first world appearance at La Scala only a few weeks before the opening of the 1881 Exhibition, and it is from discussions of the latter event that I should like to begin.

Exhibition narratives

From the very start, 1881 was a highly charged Milanese year. It was greeted by the local press as the moment that would confirm, indeed flamboyantly showcase, Milan's leadership in Italy's quest for progress and modernisation. Although hardly comparable in size and ambition to previous British (1851, 1862) and French (1855, 1867, 1878) ventures, Milan's National Exhibition of Industry and Art represented a significant advance over earlier Italian attempts, most notably Florence's of 1861.¹⁷ Born from private initiative and funded mostly through

¹⁶ For an alternative view, see Roger Parker's paper 'Opera, Place, Repertory: London in the 1830s', presented at the 2012 American Musicological Society annual meeting.

¹⁷ The Florence 1861 exhibition was the first Italian attempt at a national industrial exhibition. Conceived and financed mostly by the central government, it was loaded with political meanings. It was less successful, from a financial and organisational point of view, than the subsequent 1871 exhibition in Milan, which nevertheless remained limited to just a few industrial sectors. Another exhibition in Milan in 1874 was devoted to the display of 'historical' products of the industries, that is, to products with an artistic value. For an overview of Italian late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century exhibitions, see Mariantonietta Picone Petrusa, Maria Raffaella Pessolano and Assunta Bianco, *Le grandi esposizioni in Italia 1861-1911: la competizione culturale con l'Europa e la ricerca dello stile nazionale* (Naples, 1988). A more recent and insightful study is Cristina Della Coletta, *World's Fairs Italian Style: The Great Exhibitions in Turin and Their Narratives, 1860-1915* (Toronto, Buffalo and London, 2006). On the 1881 Milan event, see Ilaria Barzaghi, *Milano 1881: tanto lusso e tanta folla. Rappresentazione della modernità e modernizzazione popolare* (Cinisello Balsamo, 2009). For the wider European context, see Paul Greenhalgh, *Ephemeral Vistas: The Expositions Universelles, Great Exhibitions and World's Fairs, 1851-1939*

public subscription and municipal funds, the 1881 event would eventually occur in parallel with a number of other exhibitions (artistic, agrarian, didactic, etc.), including an international one dedicated to music.¹⁸

Both before and after its opening, the main Exhibition generated a flood of publications focusing both on the event and on the city more generally.¹⁹ Hailed as a ‘national triumph’ and a metaphorical space where ‘Italy narrates her own struggles and glories, her past efforts and her hopes for the future, what she is today and what she can be tomorrow’,²⁰ the Exhibition elicited complex negotiations between national and local hubris. While proudly designated ‘the product of the work of all Italians’, it was also appropriated to local-interest readings.²¹ Besides the widespread emphasis on concepts such as ‘work’ and ‘industry’ – a rhetorical device aimed at promoting traits seen as specific to Milan’s contemporary identity – accounts of the urban festival were loaded with images of Milanese history.²² Not only were the sites originally considered as possible locations for the Exhibition redolent *lieux de mémoire* from a local (at times via national) perspective;²³ the

(Manchester, 1988), and Pier Luigi Bassignana, *Le feste popolari del capitalismo: esposizioni d’industria e coscienza nazionale in Europa 1798-1911* (Turin, 1997).

¹⁸ The main Exhibition hosted 7,150 exhibitors overall (including 1,520 from the city of Milan) and was visited by approximately 1,500,000 people. For these and other figures, see Picone Petrusa, Pessolano and Bianco, *Le grandi esposizioni in Italia*, 88-91.

¹⁹ Two of the chief publications were collections of essays on various aspects of Milanese life written by renowned intellectuals, journalists and literati, and published by Vallardi and Ottino: *Mediolanum*, 4 vols. (Milan, 1881), and *Milano 1881* (Milan, 1881). Treves and Sonzogno published series of instalments dedicated to the Exhibition and containing numerous illustrations: *Milano e l’Esposizione italiana del 1881: cronaca illustrata della Esposizione nazionale-industriale ed artistica del 1881* (Milan, 1881), and *L’esposizione italiana del 1881 in Milano illustrata* (Milan, 1881).

²⁰ ‘un trionfo nazionale’: *L’illustrazione italiana*, 8 May 1881, 290; ‘tutti sentono che ivi [all’Esposizione] l’Italia narra le sue fatiche e le sue glorie, gli sforzi del passato e le speranze del futuro, quel che è oggi e quel che potrà essere domani’: *Il secolo*, 5-6 May 1881, 1.

²¹ ‘L’Esposizione Nazionale che oggi tutti, italiani e stranieri, ammirano, è opera di tutti gl’italiani. Tutti vi abbiamo collaborato’: Raffaello Barbiera, *Zig-zag per l’Esposizione nazionale* (Milan, 1881), 209.

²² On the nineteenth-century meaning of ‘industry’, as signifying broadly any type of work or activity, see Enrico Decleva, ‘Milano industriale e l’esposizione del 1881’, in *L’Italia industriale nel 1881: conferenze sulla esposizione nazionale di Milano*, ed. Decleva (Milan, 1984), xv-lxxii, here xxiii.

²³ ‘Vivissime polemiche s’impegnavano nei giornali sul luogo dove si doveva erigere il palazzo della mostra. Per un mese, la città non si occupò d’altro [...] Vi ha chi vuole l’esposizione sul corso di porta Vittoria, già sacra agli eroi delle cinque giornate: – v’ha chi la vuole nel Lazzaretto di lugubre memoria per la peste descritta dal Manzoni; chi al Foro Bonaparte davanti al castello [...] – chi entro all’Arena fatta costruire da Napoleone I; – chi fuori dell’Arco del Sempione [...] – chi

urban arena in which the Exhibition's taxonomic craze paraded also provided a common, steady platform along which to line up memories of events from the city's more or less distant past according to a coherent, unified narration. Thus the 'chain of facts' (as somebody termed it) that 'unfold under the same light' – the stream of Milanese history flowing from 'the prosperous medieval trades to Legnano, from the Cinque Giornate to the Esposizione' – served to convey a sense of both permanence and never-ending progress.²⁴

This 1881 anxiety about foreseeing the future while at the same time recollecting the past also came to be dispatched through other routes. On the one hand, the Exhibition itself had its own models, ones that prompted claims concerning the advances made by Italy over the past few decades. 'Those who have the unfortunate privilege of remembering the first Italian exhibition of 1861 and visit the present one, of 1881' – noted *L'illustrazione italiana* – 'will go through these twenty years in their minds and conclude by being glad to be Italian'.²⁵ The Milan Exhibition, that is, was directly linked back to the Florence one of twenty years earlier (mostly a political celebration of Italy's recent Unification), and was held to mark a step forward. But it was more generally Italian life that appeared to have moved on: 'After twenty years without looking at ourselves', argued Camillo Boito, 'this Italian Exhibition shouts to us: *Italy proceeds*'.²⁶

Not simply asserted, progress was also theatrically arranged. The assortment and descriptions of the items in the galleries – the main part of the Exhibition being located at the so-called Giardini pubblici – brought forth a sense of 'museality', of pleasurable meandering amidst the remains of a past purposely organised in spectacular ways. Described by one contemporary as 'a compendium' of the nation (a compendium in a geographical sense), the Exhibition was also a

nella piazza d'armi, e chi, infine, ai pubblici giardini': Giuseppe Robecchi, in Barbiera, *Zig-zag per l'Esposizione nazionale*, 188.

²⁴ 'catena di fatti [che] si svolgono sotto una stessa luce'; 'gran città che alterna le vigorose industrie medioevali con Legnano, e le Cinque Giornate con la Esposizione': *Corriere della sera*, 5-6 May 1881, 1.

²⁵ 'Chi ha il brutto privilegio di ricordarsi della prima esposizione italiana del 1861 e visita questa del 1881, ricorre con la mente questi vent'anni e conclude col sentirsi contento d'essere italiano': *L'illustrazione italiana*, 8 May 1881, 290.

²⁶ 'questa Esposizione italiana, dopo venti anni che non guardiamo noi stessi, ci grida: *L'Italia si muove*': Camillo Boito, 'Le industrie artistiche', in *L'Italia industriale nel 1881*, 21-44, 22.

concentrated account of its history.²⁷ A large part of its fetishes consisted of timeworn articles: ‘precious relics’ assembled into ‘a museum of rarities and invaluable curiosities’, as someone dubbed the musical exhibition.²⁸ Modern machines and the latest technical gadgets in all fields of industry were by no means lacking; but somehow old and new products were mixed together; all – if you will – transfigured by the exposition ‘phantasmagoria’.²⁹

Accounts of the musical exhibition are particularly telling. The exhibit was a two-location affair, split between separate sites: the Salone pompeiano (at the Giardini pubblici), assigned to the display of recent technical inventions applied to the building of modern instruments; and the Conservatorio, devoted to a multifarious historical survey of Italian musical culture (a culture embalmed in portraits of composers, musical autographs, books and treatises, collections of more or less ancient instruments, as well as letters and other secular relics that had belonged to musical celebrities).³⁰ Enjoyed as much through their referential value – their metonymical standing for larger accomplishments in Italian musical art³¹ – as through their visible qualities (often emphasised by lush cabinets),³² these ‘extremely precious, rare objects’ drew the visitors momentarily into ‘a world different from [that of their own time]’. They also, in a manner similar to the

²⁷ ‘un’Italia in compendio’: *L’illustrazione italiana*, 8 May 1881, 290.

²⁸ ‘un ammasso di preziosi cimelii’: *L’illustrazione italiana*, 8 May 1881, 290; ‘un museo di rarità e curiosità impagabili, un vero corso di storia musicale’: A. Colautti, in *Il pungolo*, 3-4 May 1881, 8.

²⁹ Walter Benjamin discusses international exhibitions in terms of phantasmagoria in various fragments of his *The Arcades Project*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA, and London, 1999).

³⁰ For an overview of the musical exhibition, see *Corriere della sera*, 6-7 May 1881, 2-3.

³¹ Della Coletta makes a similar observation about nineteenth-century exhibitions when she notes that the items on display were both ‘concrete models that could be touched and perused from all sides and signs pointing to something else’; they performed ‘a metonymical gesture’ standing for a larger whole ‘that they could not fully encompass’: Della Coletta, *World’s Fairs Italian Style*, 39.

³² ‘Fra gli intercolumni dell’edera brillano le canne degli organi e giù in mezzo alla sala, innondati dalla luce chiara che scende dall’alto, gli ottoni degli strumenti a fiato, i bronzi dei piatti e dei tam-tam, le vernici e gli intagli dei pianoforti e dei bigliardi’: A. Bazzero, in *Il pungolo*, supplement to the issue of 3-4 May 1881, 2. Drawing on Benjamin, Umberto Eco underlines the fact that objects in exhibitions are not meant to be bought, but rather be experienced through the senses as light, colour or music; see Eco, ‘A Theory of Expositions’, in Eco, *Travels in Hyper Reality: Essays*, trans. William Weaver (San Diego, New York and London, 1986), 291-307, here 294.

working of museums, sculpted an all-too-perceptible narrative of progress, one that – it was hoped – would inspire young Italians in the years to come.³³

The permeability of the quintessentially modern spaces of the museum and the industrial exhibition, as well as of their discursive entailments, has been famously evoked by Walter Benjamin in his ‘Arcades project’. In Benjamin’s fragmentary writing, commentaries on the practice of nineteenth-century *expositions universelles* are tied up with the aims and cultural premises of collecting – of what we now call ‘museum culture’. The objects on display in the public museum, those items we usually know as ‘art’, are, in his words, nothing but ‘industrial products projected into the past’. A meaning originally lacking from the objects themselves (which must be ‘detached from all [their] original functions’) is constituted through their assemblage by the collector – just as the exhibition charts and construes the visitor’s stroll via carefully preordained routes.³⁴ More recently, in his *The Birth of the Museum*, sociologist Tony Bennett has also pursued some aspects of osmosis between museums and industrial exhibitions. Bennett has called for a more nuanced understanding of these two nineteenth-century spaces’ relationship, an understanding driven less by the idea of a stark opposition – stemming from their embodiment of supposedly ‘antithetical orderings of time and space’ – than by appraisal of their mutual exchanges. Bennett has, for example, pointed out the similarity of the evolutionary narratives, as well as walking practices, characterising museums and exhibitions, thus showing how they rest on analogous concerns about time.³⁵

Bearing in mind these theoretical considerations, one could attempt tracing some of the resonances, cast in a rhetoric and language of museality and display, between the 1881 Exhibition discourse and operatic debates in Milan during the

³³ ‘oggetti preziosissimi e rari’: from Carlo Borromeo’s speech for the opening of the musical exhibition, printed in *La Lombardia*, 7 May 1881, 1. ‘ci fanno vivere per un momento in un mondo diverso dal nostro’: *Corriere della sera*, 6-7 May 1881, 2. ‘la Mostra segnerà il metro musicale dell’epoca, e del paese nostro, indicherà il progresso dell’arte, sarà un tentativo fecondo per gli studii, e ispiratore di più vasti concetti; sarà, lo spero, per questo sacrato della musica, una illustrazione di esempi, uno sprone per tutti coloro che ancor giovani, o meno e dotti negli studii musicali, qui ammireranno le autografe teorie dei sommi maestri, ne studieranno i dettami e ne trarranno utili e pratici insegnamenti’: from Borromeo’s speech, in *La Lombardia*, 7 May 1881, 1.

³⁴ Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 176 and 204.

³⁵ Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (London and New York, 1995), 5; see in particular Chapter Seven.

period. As mentioned earlier, the historicising concerns, as well as the ‘ordering ambitions’ and ‘totalizing hubris’ (in Cristina Della Coletta’s words), that characterised late-nineteenth-century industrial exhibitions – in the present case Milan’s 1881 national fair – dovetailed with similar preoccupations underpinning discussion of the Milanese opera season.³⁶ More interesting, this emerging ‘quasi-musicological’ criticism, which chimed with the age’s waxing historical self-consciousness, was keen on embracing and charting the parallel histories both of operatic compositions and their stagings. The detailed analytical and historical investigations to which both works and performances were subjected should perhaps give us pause, inviting us, as they might, to revise our visions of the nineteenth-century, work-centred Operatic Museum.

Records of change

In his study of the metaphor of *exposition* in nineteenth-century France, Philippe Hamon brings to the fore a number of fascinating exchanges – a rich texture of mutual borrowings – between the domains of architecture, literature and the practices of everyday life.³⁷ He shows how ‘expository and descriptive’ attitudes lie behind both the modern urban experience – as epitomised by the totalising, compulatory endeavours typical of museums, department stores and industrial exhibitions – and literary works, particularly (but not only) that which, after Benjamin, he calls ‘dioramic’ literature (tourist guides, books and brochures about exhibitions, collections of essays providing a panoramic overview of a certain topic, etc.). The aim of these publications, which often borrowed terms from architecture for their titles (e.g., *magasin*, *galerie*, *musée*), is, in Hamon’s words, ‘to summarize; to compose lists of sites, types, or objects; to offer a methodical overview of an entire field of knowledge; to classify; to juxtapose scenes; to render things legible by putting them on view; and to provide recreation and instruction’. In this writerly context, as well as in the larger urban material culture of the French nineteenth century, Hamon identifies an ‘exposition mentality’; some kind of

³⁶ Della Coletta, *World’s Fairs Italian Style*, 14 and 22.

³⁷ Philippe Hamon, *Expositions: Literature and Architecture in Nineteenth-Century France*, trans. Katia Sainson-Frank and Lisa Maguire (Berkeley, 1992).

shared metalanguage, built both on visual metaphors and on encyclopaedic urges, that underpinned various forms of representation.³⁸

The large majority of 1881 book-form and newspaper publications about Milan and its Exhibition have similar concerns. They provide comprehensive accounts of the city and its metaphorical, miniature recreation within the perimeter of the Exhibition (see Figure 4.1). They do so through statistics, chronologies, bird's-eye-view illustrations, and the systematic dissection of urban life into its various separate components. Music is one of several departments of investigation scanned according to this 'exposition mode'. In his speech for the opening of the musical exhibition, Carlo Borromeo takes stock of Milan's musical capital, priding himself on his city's possession of 'the largest training ground for opera, a fine array of choral and orchestral societies, schools for the development of Musical Art [and] a Royal Conservatoire in which today we have gathered'.³⁹ A certain Edwart, writing in Vallardi's four-volume essay-collection *Mediolanum*, makes a detailed inventory of the various institutions and musical genres cultivated in Milan, leaving it to his colleague Filippi to discuss the history of La Scala.⁴⁰ The latter, the author of another essay in Ottino's *Milano 1881*, starts off his own 'La musica a Milano' by declaring – in a linguistic mould that recalls the domain of spectatorship pertaining to visual (even theatrical) spectacle – that he has 'lived in Milan for almost twenty-two years, and can say that during that period he has witnessed not merely great progress, but a comprehensive upheaval in musical taste' (by which he means the spread of instrumental music and of foreign influences on Italian opera composers).⁴¹ And of course, the entire passage from Ricordi's *Gazzetta musicale* with which this chapter opened is forged by expressions that buttress the museum and exposition metaphors. It is, though, above all in discussion of contemporary opera performances that an exposition language emerges with the

³⁸ Hamon, *Expositions*, 11, 94, 95 and 87.

³⁹ 'Vanta la nostra città, la maggior palestra di opere melodrammatiche, un'eletta schiera di associazioni corali ed orchestrali; scuole per l'incremento dell'Arte Musicale; un Regio Conservatorio che oggi ci raduna': from Borromeo's speech, in *La Lombardia*, 7 May 1881, 1.

⁴⁰ See Edwart, 'La musica in Milano', in *Mediolanum*, 419-44; and Filippo Filippi, 'Il teatro della Scala', in *Mediolanum*, 445-79.

⁴¹ 'Io abito a Milano, da quasi ventidue anni, e posso dire che ho assistito, da allora ad oggi, non solo ad un gran progresso, ma ad un vero rivolgimento nel gusto musicale': Filippo Filippi, 'La musica a Milano', in *Milano 1881*, 273-310, 275.

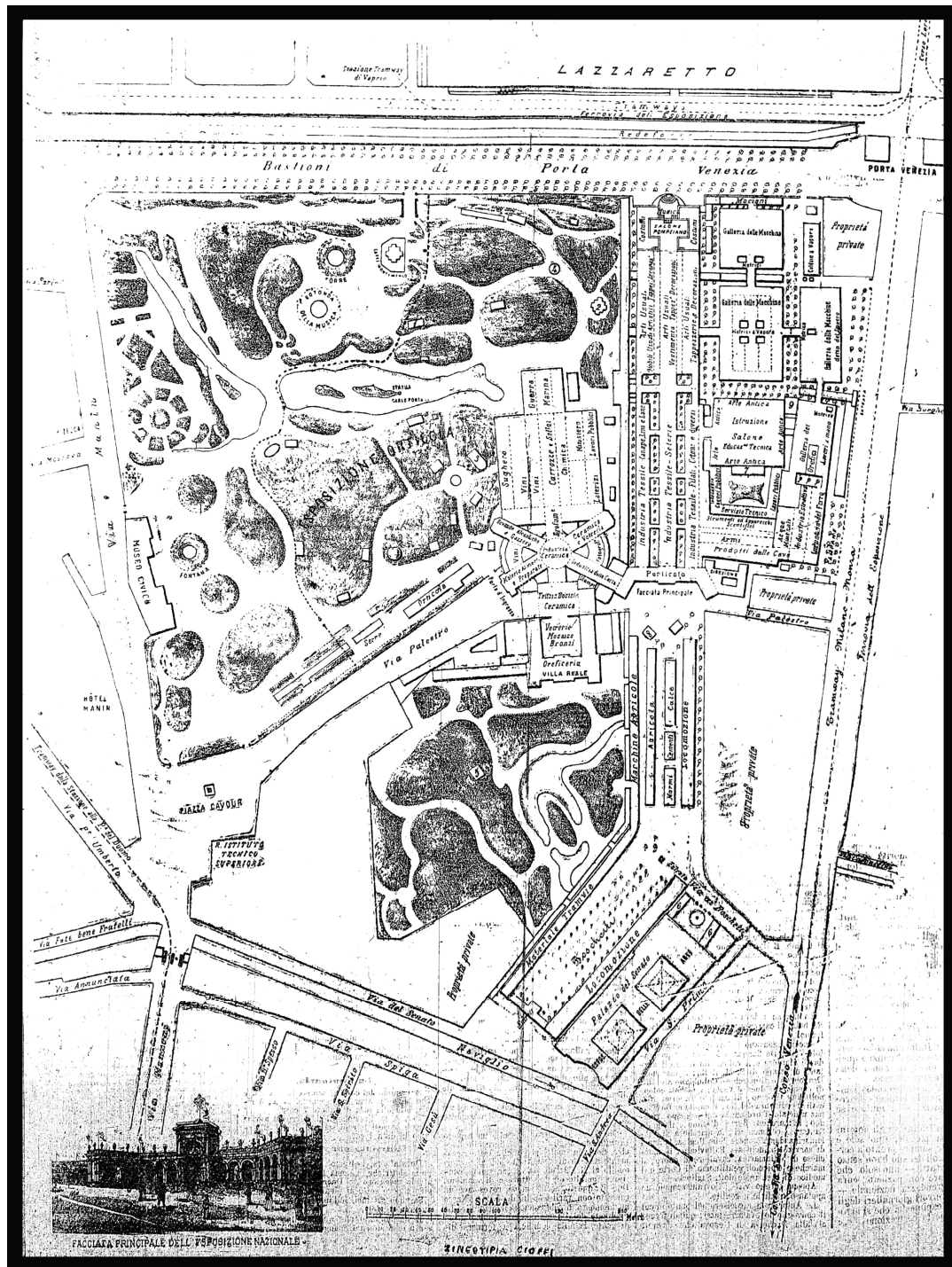


Figure 4.1: Site plan of the Exhibition, *Il pungolo*, 5-6 May 1881, 1.

greatest force: a language both dwelling consciously on the act of staging, of exhibiting afresh more or less established musical works, and imbued with marginalia about those works' compositional and performance histories.

These rhetorical devices emerged early on, in January 1881, on the occasion of the La Scala revival of *Ernani*. The production was hugely successful, owing both to the lavish staging and high standard of the performance (which featured Francesco Tamagno and Victor Maurel), and to the fact that the work had last appeared at the opera house as many as twenty years before.⁴² Critics were unanimous in referring to this revival as the 'resurrection' of a long-buried masterpiece;⁴³ of a musical object that – many argued – had since its Venice premiere in 1844 experienced 'the injuries of time'.⁴⁴ The sense of historical distance, occasioned most noticeably by the changes in singing styles, underpinned many reviews. According to Filippi, writing for *La perseveranza*, the *Ernani* performance 'was such as to make us perfectly aware that we are living in 1881 and not in 1844, that over the last 37 years many things have changed: not just the audience's taste for certain operas, but also singers' attitudes to interpreting them'.⁴⁵ Similarly, Filippi's colleague from *La ragione* remarked that, in hearing Tamagno, 'elderly people [...] searched in vain for memories of that smooth, *legato*, fluent singing to which the old training – the true singing school – used to instruct the voices'.⁴⁶ Furthermore, Verdi's music itself was taken as a yardstick to

⁴² The production opened on 29 January 1881. Besides Maurel and Tamagno, the cast included Edouard De Reszke and Anna D'Angeri. The conductor was Franco Faccio.

⁴³ *Corriere della sera*, 30-31 January 1881, 2; Athos [Virgilio Colombo], in *La Lombardia*, 30 January 1881, 3; L. Menghini, in *Il pungolo*, 30-31 January 1881, 3; 'Z.', in *Cosmorama pittorico*, 7 February 1881, 1; and F[rancesco Flores] D'Arcais, 'Rassegna musicale', *Nuova antologia di scienze, lettere ed arti*, 16/4 (1881), 707-17, 709.

⁴⁴ *La ragione*, 30-31 January 1881, 3; see also *Il sole*, 30 January 1881, 2.

⁴⁵ 'l'esecuzione [...] è stata tale da farci capire perfettamente che siamo nel 1881 anziché nel 1844, che in questi 37 anni si sono cangiate molte cose, e non solo il gusto del pubblico per certe opere, ma anche le speciali attitudini degli artisti per eseguirle': Filippo Filippi, in *La perseveranza*, 31 January 1881, 1.

⁴⁶ 'I vecchi [...] cercavano invano in lui i ricordi di quel canto piano, legato, fluente a cui la scuola antica, la vera scuola del canto, educava le voci': *La ragione*, 30-31 January 1881, 3. D'Arcais made similar comments on the vocal performance: 'Però quella parte del pubblico che, già un po' innanzi negli anni, aveva udito l'*Ernani* quando era ancor vivo l'entusiasmo per la prima maniera del Verdi, trovò che gli artisti della Scala, scelti fra i più valenti de' nostri giorni, eseguivano quest'opera assai diversamente dai loro predecessori [...] Mancano, in una parola, le tradizioni di uno stile che, come si suol dire, ha fatto il suo tempo': D'Arcais, 'Rassegna musicale', *Nuova antologia*, 16/4, 710.

measure Italy's musical progress. Although little ink was spilled over it (and over the opera's libretto), people assuming that the work's popularity (at least beyond La Scala) made it unnecessary, critics commented on the developments in musical style, once again asserting that operatic composition had over the last few decades 'made giant steps'.⁴⁷

In all these arguments there was a clear sense of the separate elements of Verdi's opera and of its performance, the work and the event. As Athos (*nom de plume* for Virgilio Colombo) bluntly put it in *La Lombardia*, 'if one wants to write an *appendice*, in 1881, about a very well-known opera, such as *Ernani*, the last thing one can talk about is the opera itself'.⁴⁸ Historical discontinuities, whether identified in Verdi's score or in the ephemeral sounds brought into being by the singers, thus kindled a heightened awareness of the hiatus between the literary-musical text and its stage enactment, with both of these coming to function as signifiers of precise historical conditions. Small wonder, then, that both operatic works and their past or present performances were investigated in forms that reveal unusual historicist effusions. The 1881 *Ernani* revival, for instance, elicited comments not only about the current performance, but also about the opera's previous stagings and the early critical debates that had followed some of those events (such as the Milan local premiere in 1844).⁴⁹ The extreme was reached when pseudo-bibliographical details of dates and casts of the work's past productions flooded the page, calling attention – in what might be read as a peculiar operation of monumentalisation – to a different type of musical object:

⁴⁷ 'Dal 1844 in poi, l'opera ha fatto passi da gigante': *Il sole*, 30 January 1881, 2. See also: 'il gusto del pubblico, profondamente mutato, non tollera più che a malincuore le cabalette, le fioriture, i pezzi e gli accompagnamenti stereotipati sulle forme solite di cinquant'anni fa': *La ragione*, 30-31 January 1881, 3. During the period comprised between the two La Scala stagings of 1861 and 1881, *Ernani* was performed at the following theatres: Santa Radegonda (1864), Carcano (1864, 1867 and 1879), Circo Ciniselli (1868), Politeama di Tivoli (1872) and Fossati (1876); see Raffaella Valsecchi and Bianca Maria Antolini, 'Cronologia sintetica delle rappresentazioni d'opera nei teatri milanesi: 1861-1897', in *Milano musicale: 1861-1897*, ed. Bianca Maria Antolini (Lucca and Milan, 1999), 43-59.

⁴⁸ 'volendo nel 1881 scrivere un'*appendice* intorno ad un'opera notissima, come l'*Ernani*, il meno di cui si possa parlare è proprio questa': Athos [Virgilio Colombo], in *La Lombardia*, 31 January 1881, 3.

⁴⁹ See Filippi, in *La perseveranza*, 31 January 1881, 1-2, and Athos, in *La Lombardia*, 31 January 1881, 3.

less Verdi-Piave's text than the plethora of performance events that text had originated.⁵⁰

Critical accounts of the disastrous *Don Giovanni* revival, premiered on 30 April and withdrawn after the second night, were also concerned not only with Mozart's work but also with its current reproduction – and with providing information about the opera's composition and early performance history.⁵¹ If someone noted that the opera itself was unsuited to the opening of the Exhibition – insofar as Mozart's score did not allow the full display of the qualities of 'a theatre whose main claims to fame are its big choral and orchestral masses',⁵² – Filippi blamed the poor quality of the staging, the act of which he referred to with an unequivocal exposition language. He lamented that *Don Giovanni* had not been staged as a *grand'opera*, with an embellished, enlarged scenic apparatus in the manner of the Paris Opéra.⁵³ Given the circumstances – he added in another article – La Scala 'should have *exhibited* a first-rate spectacle', by which he meant presented a visually and musically gratifying performance.⁵⁴ Filippi's remarks concerned the actual form of presentation of Mozart's opera; what is more, they were sustained by and called forth a precise tradition of (French) performance practices, ones that somehow were seen as canonical in their own right.

Where the dichotomy of works and performances was played out to the most thought-provoking results, however, was in reviews of Boito's *Mefistofele* and Verdi's *Simon Boccanegra*. It was these operas, which had undergone

⁵⁰ See *Il pungolo*, 28-29 January 1881, 3.

⁵¹ See Athos, in *La Lombardia*, 2 May 1881, 3; and Filippi, in *La perseveranza*, 2 May 1881, 1-2.

⁵² 'era strano ed assurdo che in un teatro il cui principale vanto è la esecuzione delle sue grandi masse corali e orchestrali, si inaugurasse una stagione specialmente destinata ai forestieri, scegliendo un'opera che lascia le masse in seconda linea, e mette in prima e in grande evidenza gli esecutori': Leone Fortis, in *Il pungolo*, 1-2 May 1881, 3.

⁵³ 'La scelta del *Don Giovanni* sarebbe stata buona, ma a due condizioni: che fossero chiamati ad eseguirlo tutti gli artisti adatti, senza eccezione, e che fosse allestito da *grand'opera*'; 'L'unica maniera di rendere il *Don Giovanni*, non solo accessibile al nostro pubblico, ma adatto al vasto palco scenico della Scala, era quella, non di impicciolare come si fece ieri sera, ma di ingrandire e di arricchire l'allestimento scenico, come al *Grand'Opéra* di Parigi, dove il *Don Giovanni* ha la stessa importanza delle grandi opere-balleri di Meyerbeer, di Halévy, di Verdi': Filippi, in *La perseveranza*, 1 May 1881, 3.

⁵⁴ 'alla Scala, in una circostanza così solenne, si doveva *esporre* uno spettacolo modello': Filippi, in *La perseveranza*, 9 May 1881, 1. Filippi must be referring to the 1866 staging of *Don Juan* at the Paris Opéra, in the five-act, French adaptation by Émile Deschamps and Henry Blaze de Bury (first performed in 1834). For performances of the opera in Milan, see Chapter Two, fn. 51.

thorough revision and raised plenty of critical debates at the time of their first performances in Milan and elsewhere, that spurred the most detailed excavations into their compositional and performance histories. Performed for the first time in Milan in its revised version on 25 May, *Mefistofele* aroused recollections of the opera's 1868 premiere (at La Scala). That performance was revisited act by act by the critic of *Il pungolo*, who remembered (or researched) not only the differences between the original and the revised libretto, but also the success of each single piece in 1868, as well the contemporary cast and the appearance of the theatre.⁵⁵ The journalist of *Il corriere della sera* also lingered over the 1868 press debates, once again providing an account of the outcome of the opera's first performance.⁵⁶ On his part, Filippi reprinted a few passages from his own 1868 review, going on to imagine – in what is one of the most astonishing operatic reveries to be read from late-nineteenth-century Milan – an utopian 1911 world in which the merits of Boito's original work would eventually be recognised: recognised tangibly, by way of a finally suitable, finally up-to-the-required-standards musical performance.⁵⁷

In the case of *Simon Boccanegra*, critics' archaeologies went even further.⁵⁸ Verdi's opera had been premiered (unsuccessfully) in its initial version at La Fenice, Venice in March 1857, and subsequently performed (to similar lack of success) in Milan during the political turmoil of 1859. Critics were, for one thing, untiring in identifying the new sections of the score; indeed Verdi's potpourri of forms and styles made history's inexorable march unquestionably manifest.⁵⁹ Furthermore, references to the 1857 premiere and the debates that had surrounded it were the norm in many reports – Filippi even reprinted in full his own 1857 review – and memories of the 1859 Milanese debut surfaced on several

⁵⁵ See *Il pungolo*, 24-25 May 1881, 3.

⁵⁶ See Bob, in *Corriere della sera*, 25-26 May 1881, 2.

⁵⁷ See Filippi, in *La perseveranza*, 30 May 1881, 1-2.

⁵⁸ Premiered at La Scala on 24 March 1881, the revised opera was performed overall ten times during that season. The cast included Tamagno (Adorno), Maurel (Boccanegra), De Reszke (Fiesco) and D'Angeri (Amelia). Later stagings at La Scala took place in March 1882 and January 1890.

⁵⁹ See Filippi, in *La perseveranza*, 25 March 1881, 2; 'F.', in *Il mondo artistico*, 28 March 1881, 1-2; and 'A.', in *La ragione*, 25-26 March 1881, 3 (the latter with judgements of the old and the new pieces often in contrast with those of most of his colleagues). In particular, most critics underlined Verdi's revisions to (or, in the first case, dropping of) the 1857 cabalettas closing Amelia's aria, the Amelia-Gabriele duet, and the Amelia-Simone duet (all from Act 1).

occasions.⁶⁰ But what is most fascinating is that the multiple temporal frames to which the 1881 work gestured – through its medieval plot, through reminiscences of the original version, as well as through memories attached to the opera's early stagings – were reflected in the handling of different types of information within the reviews: the libretto and the music, Piave's text and Boito's amendments, Verdi's 1857 work and his recent updating, or even the revised composition and its first performance – all these topics were often dealt with separately. The deluge of historical awareness thus became translated into remarkable distillations of operatic meaning.⁶¹

Critics such as Filippi and his anonymous colleague of *Il corriere della sera*, both of whom operated along these lines, were of course not setting forth any groundbreaking new concept: the operatic repertory had, by 1881, become established firmly enough to account for ever more frequent distinctions between lasting literary and musical texts, and disparate revisitations through performance. Of course, reporters finding themselves obliged to review brand new works – such as Ponchielli's *Il figliuol prodigo*, which opened the 1880-81 La Scala Carnival season – would lag somewhat behind in their articulation of this divide. Remarks about the music could still be tightly enmeshed with comments on singers and audience response.⁶² In these cases, one could claim, it would necessitate extended exposure to any given opera for these nineteenth-century journalists to come to relinquish their jumbled-together attitudes to elements pertaining to the work and elements belonging to the performance.

⁶⁰ See Filippi, in *La perseveranza*, 25 March 1881, 2; 'b', in *Corriere della sera*, 24-25 March 1881, 2-3; and 'F.', in *Il mondo artistico*, 28 March 1881, 1-2.

⁶¹ See, in particular, Filippi, in *La perseveranza*, 25 March 1881, 2; and 'b', in *Corriere della sera*, 24-25 March 1881, 2-3. Particularly notable is the fact that the second critic conceived his piece *before* the premiere took place. The short sections he devotes to *gl'interpreti di stasera* and to *l'allestimento scenico*, both coming after lengthy accounts of various aspects of Verdi's work and its previous stagings, are thus all the more remarkable through their anticipation of and desire to investigate the stage event.

⁶² See the following example, from a review of *Il figliuol prodigo*: 'Gli è che la grandiosità pura, solenne del primo di questi due pezzi [il coro d'introduzione del primo atto] e il calore, la passione, l'impeto del secondo [il finale di quell'atto] hanno il pregio di quelle grandi bellezze che s'intuiscono subito e vi affascinano e vi dominano e vi fanno balzare in piedi, come balzò il pubblico ieri sera – quando la strapotente voce del Tamagno, il suo accento caldo, appassionato, il suo gesto efficace diede alla limpida frase dominante del finale tutto il suo splendore – quando nella introduzione la voce morbida, facile, vellutata della D'Angeri e il suo canto squisito, contribuirono a dare rilievo alla grandiosa serenità della introduzione': *Il pungolo*, 27-28 December 1880, 2.

There may be ways, though, in which the nineteenth century's burgeoning distinction between operatic texts and acts of revisitation through performance could offer new perspectives for interpretation, and be examined within a larger picture. The increasing scrutiny of single components of an operatic text (the libretto, the music or specific versions of either of them) and of individual opera performances suggests a sense in which operatic compositions – both the 'works themselves' and their staged re-enactments – were at this period hardening into landmarks on the map of Italy's musical progress. The level of analytical and historical detail into which critical reviews often went, that is, points to a need to construe and narrate the past in order to make the present stand out in a distinct and more prominent position. A concern with time lay behind the encyclopaedic urge and the orderly compilation of information disclosed by the 1881 opera reviews; an anxiety similar to that elicited by the carefully organised array of objects in the locales of the Exhibition.

Following loosely Richard Terdiman's cultural approach to nineteenth-century newspaper discourse and technology, I thus wish to pursue some of the possible implications of the 'topology of [...] interpenetrating discourses' – about works and performances – that has emerged from the 1881 Milanese reports.⁶³ I will, however, pursue such implications by now steering my point of observation into a different type of documents: the so-called *disposizioni sceniche*, published by Ricordi from the mid 1850s.⁶⁴ I will approach these documents, in particular the staging manual for *Simon Boccanegra*, as texts calling upon compelling explorations of the status of operatic compositions and their performances in late-nineteenth-century Italy; as sources that can bring new insights, operating

⁶³ Richard Terdiman, *Discourse/Counter-Discourse: The Theory and Practice of Symbolic Resistance in Nineteenth-Century France* (Ithaca and London, 1985), 125; see, in particular, Chapters Two and Three. According to Terdiman, nineteenth-century newspaper culture reflects the fragmentariness of modern urban life through the multiplicity of discrete items and discourses that cluster within newspapers' anti-organicist layout.

⁶⁴ The first *disposizione* published by Ricordi was that for *Giovanna de Guzman* (issued in 1856), a translation of the *livret de mise en scène* for Verdi's *Les Vêpres siciliennes* published in Paris by Louis Palianti. Ricordi's practice of publishing staging manuals gradually came to a halt after 1893, while his rival Sonzogno issued a few production books between 1894 and 1922. For a brief overview of the Verdi *disposizioni*, see David Rosen, 'disposizione scenica', in *The Cambridge Verdi Encyclopedia*, ed. Roberta Montemorra Marvin (Cambridge, 2013), 124-6.

alongside some of the questions raised by the opera reviews, into our understanding of nineteenth-century stances on the operatic medium.

The *disposizioni*'s whims and quandaries

In recent years, nineteenth-century opera staging manuals have aroused a good deal of scholarly debate. The *disposizioni sceniche*'s function, as well as that of their French ancestors (the *livrets de mise en scène*), has been variously discussed, with scholars emphasising the manuals' descriptive as well as prescriptive aims. Both businesses were, to a lesser or greater degree, always at work. The production books' function oscillated between providing a record of an opera's first performance, or of a later one (as with many Parisian *livrets*), or of a combination of elements pertaining to various early performances (Boito's *Mefistofele*); and furnishing authorially-sanctioned guidance for subsequent productions. The implications of the manuals' two-fold preoccupations are indeed numerous, and have in part already been pursued in interesting ways. Perhaps one of the most fascinating routes trodden over the last few years has been that opened by Roger Parker, whose reading of some Verdi *livrets* is driven by the idea that these texts can lay claim to constituting (also) documents of reception: that staging manuals are scattered with traces of the interpretation or reception of the opera performance(s) by the individuals who compiled those accounts.⁶⁵ In what follows,

⁶⁵ See Roger Parker, 'Reading the *Livrets*, or the Chimera of "Authentic" Staging', in Parker, *Leonora's Last Act: Essays in Verdian Discourse* (Princeton, 1997), 126-48. In the same line, see also Cormac Newark, 'Ceremony, Celebration, and Spectacle in *La Juive*', in *Reading Critics Reading: Opera and Ballet Criticism in France from the Revolution to 1848*, ed. Roger Parker and Mary Ann Smart (Oxford, 2001), 155-87, esp. 181-4. For a different view, see David Rosen, 'La mess' in scena delle opere di Verdi. Introduzione alle "disposizioni sceniche" Ricordi', in *La drammaturgia musicale*, ed. Lorenzo Bianconi (Bologna, 1986), 209-22; and, by the same author, the more recent 'Some Thoughts on the Three Systems of Opera and on the Staging Manuals', at http://www.academia.edu/4428902/Some_Thoughts_on_the_Three_Systems_of_Opera_and_on_the_Staging_Manuals (accessed 13 February 2014). On the Italian *disposizioni sceniche*, see also the introductory essays to the various volumes in *Musica e spettacolo: collana di disposizioni sceniche diretta da Francesco Degrada e Mercedes Viale Ferrero* (Milan, 1990-2002). For the French *livrets*, see the introductions to H. Robert Cohen and Marie-Odile Gigou, *Cent ans de mise en scène lyrique en France (env. 1830-1930)* (New York, 1986), and *The Original Staging Manuals for Twelve Parisian Operatic Premières*, ed. H. Robert Cohen (New York, 1991); and Arnold Jacobshagen, 'Staging at the Opéra-Comique in Nineteenth-Century Paris: Auber's *Fra Diavolo* and the *livrets de mise-en-scène*', *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 13/3 (2001), 239-60, as well as his 'Analysing Mise-en-Scène: Halévy's *La Juive* at the Salle Le Peletier', in *Music Theater and*

I shall draw on somewhat similar assumptions, and will focus on a number of passages from the *disposizione scenica* for *Simon Boccanegra*. But my considerations will be less concerned with what this Verdi *disposizione* can tell us about contemporary responses to aspects of the opera's first performance, more with the manual's articulation of the domains of the work and the performance.

There is a sense, of course, in which the later *disposizioni sceniche* published by Ricordi, such as the one for *Boccanegra* (1883) or the even more elaborate ones for *Mefistofele* (1877) and *Otello* (1887), point to an increasing textualisation of visual and dramatic aspects of the work, the staging manual coming to assume a function similar and complementary to that of the libretto and the score (the authority of which had by the 1870s or 1880s become, not least through Verdi's *gravitas*, more or less generally accepted). In this sense, these *disposizioni* (at least in Verdi's and Boito's intentions) were to be seen as part of the 'text' of the work: a text on which rested the durability and possibility of future re-enactment of the opera according to its authors' conception.⁶⁶ What is most fascinating, though, is that very often the staging manuals comprise attempts at textualising live performance: if we recall these documents' recording function, then we could argue that aspects of an event or several events – the opera's first performance or various early performances – were being made into a text in order to allow for and guarantee those very *events*' reproducibility. This strategy betrayed the other side of the coin of an age famously seduced by ideas of progress and change: the faith that not only works, but also aspects of their performance, could be preserved through time; the belief that in spite of evolving technologies and fickle operatic practices, future spaces of experience and horizons of expectation could continue to match present ones.

There is another way, however, in which elements of performance creep into the lines of these later *disposizioni sceniche*: whenever these manuals, and thus

Cultural Transfer: Paris, 1830-1914, ed. Annegret Fauser and Mark Everist (Chicago, 2009), 176-94.

⁶⁶ My use of the term 'text' is according to the old, pre-poststructuralist sense: something with a closed or stable meaning, stemming from authorial intentions, and thus a correlate of the concept of 'work'. Without granting 'text' this stability, the possibility of reproduction or re-enactment of an operatic work according to the author's intentions – an idea which is central to the rhetoric and *raison d'être* of the Ricordi *disposizioni* – would be altogether disposed of.

also the works they are meant to entrench, summon up their own dependence on stage events, at times even invoking the unpredictability of these phenomena. In some cases, this is accomplished through those famous appellations, perhaps especially blunt in (though not exclusive to) the later Verdi manuals, to the singers' role in achieving a correct interpretation of the music, both vocally and dramatically.⁶⁷ The passage that closes Act 1 in the *disposizione* for *Boccanegra*, and that comes after a minute description (or *prescription*?) of the malediction scene, is a famous case in point:

La semplice lettura di questa scena darà un'idea dell'importanza di essa. Ma non è l'arida descrizione di un gesto, di un passo innanzi o indietro quella che può rendere efficace sulla scena questo svolgimento drammatico, questo succedersi di episodi e di passioni terribili. La messa in scena non fa che segnare materialmente e per sommi capi le varie posizioni che per ragioni musicali o drammatiche devono prendere i vari personaggi e le masse: ma la scena fra il Doge e Paolo non avrà la sua voluta interpretazione se non da *due attori sommamente intelligenti*, e che perciò sappiano sviscerare il concetto musicale ed il concetto drammatico ad un tempo e raggiungere così lo scopo d'interessare e commuovere gli spettatori.⁶⁸

[A simple reading of this scene will give an idea of its importance. But the dry description of a gesture or of a step forwards or backwards cannot render effective the dramatic development, the succession of episodes and terrible passions that take place on stage. The above directions only denote in a summary way the various physical positions that characters and crowds must take for musical or dramatic reasons; the scene between the Doge and Paolo, however, will live up to its intended interpretation only if *two actors of extreme intelligence* know how to extract both its musical and dramatic concepts, and thus achieve the aim of gripping and moving the spectator.]

In these instances, the *disposizione*'s Foucauldian rhetoric of power and all-pervading authorial control is enacted exactly by way of entrusting part of that command to the performers. But there is more to this. My impression is that whenever pleas of this kind are voiced, this happens because what is ultimately at stake here – what rests at the heart of the author(s)'s concerns – is the sensorial and emotional effect, whatever the means to achieve it, that the actualised scene will have on the audience. Words or concepts such as 'effect', 'efficacious' and 'raising interest' are recurrent in these sorts of assertions, and are contrasted with the idea

⁶⁷ The *disposizione* for Amilcare Ponchielli's *I Lituani* contains a few, if less boorish (than those found in the Verdi manuals), comments of this kind.

⁶⁸ *Disposizione scenica per l'opera Simon Boccanegra di Giuseppe Verdi, compilata e regolata secondo la messa in scena del Teatro alla Scala da Giulio Ricordi* (Milan, [1883]), repr. in Marcello Conati and Natalia Grilli, '*Simon Boccanegra*' di *Giuseppe Verdi*, Musica e spettacolo: collana di disposizioni sceniche (Milan, 1993), 127-86, 156; translation quoted with modifications from *Verdi's Otello and Simon Boccanegra (Revised Version) in Letters and Documents*, ed. and trans. Hans Busch, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1988), II, 456.

of an ‘arid’ or ‘cold’ description of stage movements and expression – which is all the manual can convey.⁶⁹ While most of the *disposizione*’s task consists in supplying directions for the singers-actors, occasionally the point of view briskly shifts: the audience’s presence suddenly beckons, and with it does the ontological difference between the text of the work and any possible realisation of it through performance.

Here is where the attempt at negotiating this divide, between work and performance, emerges most clearly – and emerges precisely from ‘a moment of reflection’, in Erika Fischer-Lichte’s words, on the limits of staging. Far from serving only as a further component (alongside the libretto and the score) of the opera’s text, the *disposizione* also comprises a ‘plan’ for enacting the work through performance. This plan, through which Fischer-Lichte spells out the concept of staging or *mise en scène*, ‘is undertaken with the audience’s perception in mind’. The idea of staging, in other words, ‘proceeds from the very assumption of a difference between staging and performance’, between the plan and the outcome of each single attempt to materialise it.⁷⁰ Occasionally – as in the passage from the *disposizione* for *Boccanegra* quoted above – the awareness of the contingency of the performance event is such as to become deliberately embraced within the text of the work.⁷¹

⁶⁹ See the following passages from the *disposizione*, quoted from Conati and Grilli, ‘*Simon Boccanegra*’ di Giuseppe Verdi: ‘Le interrogazioni dell’uno [il Doge], le risposte dell’altra [Amelia], l’ansia, l’interesse ognor più crescente del Doge sono troppo chiaramente scolpiti dalla musica, perché sia necessario indicare minutamente l’azione da seguirsi dai due attori: è questa [il duetto Doge-Amelia nel prologo] una di quelle scene drammatiche-musicali, le quali hanno il loro effetto dal talento, dall’intuizione degli artisti, né una fredda descrizione scenica otterrebbe lo scopo, qualora gli attori non comprendano naturalmente e non sappiano estrinsecare le passioni potenti da cui sono animate e commossi’ (143-4); ‘Il grande interesse che desterà questa scena [della sommossa] nel pubblico, compenserà ad usura tutto lo studio che si porrà per riescire a rappresentare con naturalezza ed efficacia tale episodio del dramma’ (155); and the passage that closes Act 1, quoted in the main text.

⁷⁰ Erika Fischer-Lichte, *The Transformative Power of Performance: A New Aesthetics*, trans. Saskya Iris Jain (London and New York, 2008), 188 and 187; about the differences between staging and performance, see esp. 182-90.

⁷¹ This blurring, in the later *disposizioni sceniche*, of aspects of text and aspects of staging is also manifest, as are several other elements typical of the Ricordi manuals, in a number of Italian drama scripts dating from the late nineteenth century. Playwrights such as Achille Torelli, Teobaldo Ciconi and Paolo Ferrari started to include *quadri di piazzamento* and other staging indications (ones with a prescriptive tone often similar to that of the Ricordi *disposizioni*) in their texts from the early 1860s; see Gaetano Oliva, *La letteratura teatrale italiana e l’arte dell’attore, 1860-1890* (Turin, 2007), esp. 50-80.

In other cases, it is the attempt to coordinate precisely the visual, musical, spoken and (so to speak) ‘psychological’ utterances that gestures to the ephemerality and (ultimately) to the limits of authorial determination of live stage action. Sometimes it is the redundancy of such cues – the dissipation into lengthy, diachronic description of what in performance unfolds synchronically in a few fleeting moments – that makes the event’s resistance to translation into text manifest. This is the case, for instance, in Boccanegra’s curse on Paolo at the end of Act 1. The passage from the *disposizione* reads as follows:

Il **Doge** terribile grida: *Sia maledetto*, poi d’un tratto afferra violentemente col sinistro il braccio destro di **Paolo**, e colla mano destra tesa verso di costui, soggiunge subito cupamente ma con accento di comando: *E tu ripeti il giuro*.

Paolo è colpito quasi mortalmente da questo anatema: il suo volto dinota il più grande spavento: vorrebbe rifiutarsi, ma poi soggiogato dallo sguardo del **Doge**, si svincola e fa un passo innanzi, gridando tremante: *Sia maledetto*, poi subito si copre il volto colle mani mormorando: *Orrore! orror!*⁷²

[The **Doge** cries out, in a frightening manner: *Sia maledetto*; then suddenly, with his left hand, he grabs **Paolo**’s right arm, and with his right hand stretched out towards him, straightaway darkly adds a command: *E tu ripeti il giuro*.

Paolo is almost struck dead by this anathema: his face denotes the greatest fright: he would refuse, but, subjugated by the **Doge**’s eyes, frees himself and takes a step forwards, tremblingly crying out: *Sia maledetto*; he then instantly covers his face with his hands, whispering: *Orrore! orror!*]

The attempt to both compress and convey in full the irre(pro)ducible thickness of staged human expression leads to the description of a sequence of actions and moods that, in a sense, can only further expose the gap existing between the authorially-sanctioned text and its enactment. At other times, again in a bid for coordinating control, the staging manual submits to the aleatoric pace of what will be always different stage events: mixing its voice of authority with mild respect at those variables brought about by performance, the *disposizione* arranges all stage action around these inconstant elements. At the very end of Verdi’s opera, it is the unpredictable *durée* of the curtain-close (expressed in the manual as: ‘the curtain falls slowly’) that dictates the amount of time during which both characters and crowds will ‘have to maintain the utmost stillness’.⁷³ Not curtain timings or

⁷² *Disposizione scenica per l’opera* Simon Boccanegra, 155; translation quoted, with modifications, from *Verdi’s Otello* and Simon Boccanegra, II, 455.

⁷³ ‘Il sipario cala lentamente: TUTTI devono mantenere la più completa immobilità fintanto che il sipario non sia completamente calato’: *Disposizione scenica per l’opera* Simon Boccanegra, 176.

indications coordinating the *sipario* with precise musical occurrences, but the performance holds a regulative role. In all these instances, then, the event-performance retains both its own distinctiveness and an intrinsic regulative function within the textualised account (of that same real or foreseen event) provided by the staging manual.

The situation is in many ways quite different with the earlier *disposizioni sceniche* (such as that for *Un ballo in maschera*) or the French tradition of staging manuals. Perhaps unsurprisingly – if we keep in mind Fischer-Lichte’s explanation of staging as comprising both a plan and the awareness of its always particular embodiments in performance – these documents bear both fewer hints of the changeable actuality of stage events, and fewer prescriptive claims. Far from seeking to engage with, and master, the many possible variables of performance, these earlier and the French staging manuals read more like detached descriptions, mostly visual chronicles of a given stage event. Their claim for the reproducible quality of once-and-for-all approved stage action is more hushed, the friction between contingent unfolding of events (ever lurking in the ways just mentioned) and steady, re-enactable scripts somehow less pronounced.

How, then, can this commingling, in the later *disposizioni*, of durability and volatility, of textualisation and pending eventuality, of (ultimately) ‘elements of work’ and ‘elements of performance’ inform afresh our views about musicological attitudes both past and present? It could, perhaps, direct us towards new ways of approaching that work/performance distinction that had become increasingly clear for late-nineteenth-century (Italian and otherwise) critics. It could encourage us to apply further interpretative pressure to opera criticism from the period. Rather than see operatic works and performances as travelling, in nineteenth-century understandings, on increasingly divergent routes – ones leading to posterity-targeted museum preservation on the one hand, and to unrelenting oblivion on the other – we could reconsider the extent to which actual performances might too, on occasion, have aroused fantasies of sturdiness and incorruptibility. Though none of those events was ever to be replicated, their vanishing quality was ever more frequently inscribed in time-resistant accounts. Those performances too, as

composers' masterpieces, became monumental markers in the highway of Italy's musical journey.

Still, whenever operatic performances were fancied to possess work-like durability, they were seen as bearing the signs of distance, traces of their vanished ephemerality. In order to take on some of the enduring quality pertaining to the objects that were coming to form the Operatic Museum, those performances had to be historicised, pushed back into their own time.⁷⁴ Their chronological coordinates, the date so protruding from those events' journalistic portraits, became their prominent feature, handed on to posterity; the coexistence of lasting authorial instructions and unrepeatable stage occurrences were to become increasingly asserted by the staging manuals. Indeed it was only by espousing, as in *Simon Boccanegra*'s final moments, those performances' baggage of wayward, lively, but nevertheless evanescent actuality that a momentary illusion of time's 'utmost stillness' could be produced.

Ekphrastic scapes

Before I set up this chapter for conclusion, I should like to address the work/performance dichotomy from one final, yet different perspective; and with it also reappraise the view of nineteenth-century opera criticism as a medium increasingly and primarily serving for investigations of musical works or, on account of enlarging perceptions of historical and musical development, for recording the ephemeralia of musical performances. What if we were to approach a critical review pondering less for what it records than for the experience it means to produce in the reader? What if we regarded its aim to be that of *re-enacting* the sensorial and emotional effect aroused in the theatre by a given opera performance? I think an operation of this kind would complicate further our exegetical ventures into nineteenth-century attitudes to opera performances; it would add yet another level on which the transient quality of those events might be superseded by laying out the possibility of reproducing at least their experience.

⁷⁴ The steadiness of History, as Barthes reminds us, is constituted 'only if we consider it, only if we look at it, [only if we are] excluded from it': Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 65.

CHAPTER FOUR

Il Doge parla ai consiglieri; d'un tratto un lontano tumulto si eleva; ecco le plebi insaziabili, irrequiete che gridano: *Morte al Doge*, per gridare poi *evviva* al primo squillo di tromba; la paura di Paolo, l'ansietà de' Consiglieri, il superbo disprezzo di Simone, l'accendersi, il calmarsi del tumulto popolare sono resi con una indescrivibile potenza di colorito. Entra il popolo: il disprezzo di Simone si è mutato in profonda pietà:

Plebe! Patrizi! – Popolo

Dalla feroce storia!

Ma il punto culminante, gigantesco vien dopo. Il Doge, con forza terribile chiama a sé Paolo; ei s'avanza e nelle due parole ch'egli dice: *Mio Duce!* vi ha tutta la paura, la viltà del traditore. Il Doge, con supremo sarcasmo dapprima, poi con forza veramente formidabile, lo investe... lo accusa, lo costringe a pronunziare esso stesso: *Sii maledetto*... Ciò che esprime in questo punto l'orchestra, non si può descrivere. E quando Paolo ha ripetuto le parole... e le turbe con un grido dapprima, poi con sommessa voce hanno gridato *Sii maledetto*, l'effetto è... non so trovar le parole! Io non ho mai provato, non proverò mai una sensazione uguale. Il respiro è allentato: si è esterrefatti, sbalorditi... Passa il genio che atterrisce!...⁷⁵

[The Doge talks to the counsellors; all of a sudden, a riot is heard in the distance; and there is the insatiable populace shouting: *Death to the Doge*, before crying out *evviva* at the first blare of the trumpet; Paolo's fear, the Counsellors' anxiety, Simone's haughty disdain, the flaring up, the calming of the populace's riot are conveyed with ineffably vivid colours. The populace enters: Simone's disdain has turned into a profound sense of piety:

Plebeians! Patricians! – People

With a fierce history!

But the climax, immense, comes next. The Doge calls Paolo forth with terrible force; Paolo moves forwards and in the two words he utters – *My leader!* – is all the fear, all the cowardice of the traitor. The Doge, first with supreme sarcasm, then with really formidable power, confronts him... accuses him, obliges him to himself pronounce: *Let him be cursed*... That which the orchestra expresses at this point cannot be described. And when Paolo has repeated the words... and the masses, first with a cry, then whispering have cried *Let him be cursed*, the effect is... I am unable to find the words! I have never felt, will never feel the same emotion. Breathing is slowed down: one is astonished, amazed... The terrific genius passes by!...]

Were it not for the last few lines, which betray its nature as *post-facto*, critical-personal commentary, this passage could almost be mistaken for an extract from the staging manual for *Simon Boccanegra*. It does not lack the Ricordi *disposizioni*'s plethora of adjectives giving voice to dramatic intentions and emotions; nor the staging manuals' striving to depict, particularly in large-scale, *tableau*-like Finali, the mood and concerns of each single character; nor does the passage dispense with an at least quick reference to the interlacing of stage and musical events (*per gridare poi evviva al primo squillo di tromba*). At certain points, the language even draws closely on expressions-indications from the score and the libretto (the *disposizione scenica* is less likely to have been available for consultation to music critics), thus making – in conjunction with the other factors

⁷⁵ 'C', in *GMM*, 28 January 1883, 36.

just mentioned – for an account potentially evoking blurred descriptive and prescriptive tones.⁷⁶

It is, however, above all the extract's uncertain temporal positioning with respect to the events it summons up that invites attention. The passage is taken from a review of the Turin premiere of *Simon Boccanegra* that appeared in the *Gazzetta musicale di Milano* in January 1883. It doubtless to some extent provides an account, no matter how deeply ingrained in the author's personal views, of the unfolding of that performance – something attested by the passage's closing lines, with their powerful evocation of the sentiments induced by the event. The report, however, through its reliance on the present tense and the self-assuredness with which it charts the flow of musical and dramatic occurrences, also seems to invoke a larger measure of permanence for its object of discussion than that enclosed in a single, passing performance: assumedly the presence of Verdi's, or Verdi-Boito's, work. It is hard, even impossible in most cases to decide whether a remark applies to the performance or to the operatic text: our ability to distinguish claims concerning the work from claims concerning the performance collapses under the linguistic and rhetorical ambiguity in which the passage is weaved.

From a discursive point of view, the apparatus of the Turin *Boccanegra* review is such that it suggests not only a description of how given stage events unfolded, but also an attempt to re-enact the very experience of that performance (the latter being understood mostly from the audience's perspective). The abundance of adjectives is one of the means through which this attempt is carried out. But it is above all the climax of the Act-1 Finale, addressed in the second paragraph of the above quotation, that gradually becomes translated, linguistically absorbed into the narration – through the use of punctuation and the string of subjects and verbs of action. In so doing, this rhetorical climax predisposes the

⁷⁶ The original libretto and the score have 'con forza terribile' and 'con tremenda maestà e con violenza sempre più formidabile': *Simon Boccanegra: melodramma in un prologo e tre atti di F. M. Piave, musica di G. Verdi, Teatro alla Scala, Stagione 1880-1881* (Milan, 1881), 31-2, repr. in Conati and Grilli, '*Simon Boccanegra*' di Giuseppe Verdi, 109-23; and the modern Ricordi full score of Giuseppe Verdi, *Simon Boccanegra (seconda versione)* (Milan, 2004), 234-5. The *disposizione scenica* says: 'il Doge [...] con voce terribile chiama: Paolo!' and 'il Doge con tremenda maestà e con violenza sempre più formidabile...': *Disposizione scenica per l'opera Simon Boccanegra*, 154. It is only the Finale to Act 1 that receives such treatment in the article; all other scenes are discussed only briefly, and by no means arouse a scrutiny of or attempt at re-enacting dramatic elements similar to those spurred on by this Finale.

reader to participate in the same experience as the critic-listener in the theatre. The journalist's account thus also comes to function as a means for perpetuating, for somehow re-embodying over and over certain elements of the opera performance.

This aspect of the report has suggestive connections with that type of literary and non-literary writing known as *ekphrasis*. The term has been variously defined and used (originally the word belonged to the field of rhetoric), but its meaning can be summarised as 'the verbal representation of visual representation'.⁷⁷ *Ekphrasis* does not only apply to literary texts, such as poems based on or including depictions of visual works of art (John Keats's *Ode on a Grecian Urn*, for instance); it can also refer to art criticism, and more generally to any kind of writing or commentary on images.⁷⁸ The crucial point here, though, is, in Peter Wagner's definition, that *ekphrasis* has a 'Janus face': its aim is both to 'give voice to the allegedly silent image', by embodying or re-enacting some of its qualities rather than merely describing them; and to fix it, subdue its overpowering signification – in order to make it 'readable, accessible' by means of words. *Ekphrasis* has a 'paradoxical' nature; it feeds on the intrinsic dissimilarities between verbal and visual (one could also add musical) media.⁷⁹ What is more, it is built upon a dialectic of presence and absence, of meaning in play and meaning related, of references to a self-standing (perhaps forever lost) object and attempts at renewing the experience it awakened.

The 1883 *Boccanegra* review, as per the Act-1 Finale, is fraught with similar concerns. But the more its language seeks to 'produce presence' – to put it in Gumbrechtian terms – the more it is revealed as inadequate to recreate the live experience of the performance (*Ciò che esprime in questo punto l'orchestra, non si può descrivere; l'effetto è... non so trovar le parole!*).⁸⁰ If that event is made retrievable and enduring in some sense, it is so while also exposing the incapacity

⁷⁷ James A. W. Heffernan, *Museum of Words: The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery* (Chicago and London, 1993), 3.

⁷⁸ See Peter Wagner, 'Introduction: Ekphrasis, Iconotexts, and Intermediality – the State(s) of the Art(s)', in *Icons-Texts-Iconotexts: Essays on Ekphrasis and Intermediality*, ed. Peter Wagner (Berlin and New York, 1996), 1-40, here 14.

⁷⁹ Wagner, 'Introduction', 13 and 29; see also Heffernan, *Museum of Words*, 6.

⁸⁰ Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, *Production of Presence: What Meaning Cannot Convey* (Stanford, 2004).

of any verbal account to tame its full baggage of characteristic, un-reiterable eloquence.

This desire of ‘presentification’, of making the past once again, or ever, accessible, according to Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht lies at the heart of our own, contemporary historical culture. This ‘longing for presence’ is, however, rooted a long way back in what Nora has called – to repeat an expression quoted earlier in this thesis – the nineteenth century’s “‘acceleration of history”, the increasingly rapid disappearance of things’.⁸¹ In fact, that century’s desires for permanence and accessibility to the past are the complements of an historical culture placing as much emphasis on progress and historical change. Historicism was, of course, the drive that inspired much of the 1881 Milan Industrial Exhibition; the impulse that, among other factors, bolstered the establishment of what we have come to know as the Operatic Museum. But within the still expanding walls of that imaginary warehouse came to be gathered both works and performances. The line of separation and the relationship between the two in fact have been endlessly redrawn, at times overtly blurred through history – and demanding constant reappraisal, too, as our academic vistas roll on.

The notion of enduring musical works may have a greater aura than evanescent performances; perhaps it serves better our needs periodically to fill up those former, always-at-hand musical objects with our own, constantly changing agendas. But as James Hepokoski has reminded us in a recent and subtle overview of musicological attitudes that both dismiss and (latently) retain Dahlhaus’s Beethoven-Rossini dualism, performance events can also be regarded as texts: ‘genuine works, albeit of a second order [...] equally open to study and exegetical interpretation’.⁸² What is most relevant within the present discussion, such performance-centred historical-analytical attitudes were already becoming visible,

⁸¹ Gumbrecht, *Production of Presence*, 106; and Pierre Nora, ‘General Introduction’, in *Rethinking France: Les Lieux de mémoire*, trans. Mary Trouille, 4 vols. (Chicago, 2001-10), I, *The State*, vii-xxii, xviii. Gumbrecht reads a difference between our own and the nineteenth century’s historical culture. He argues that while an interest in recovering knowledge of the past (in order to learn from it and thus shape the future) developed during the nineteenth century, the desire of ‘presentification’, the need to fill up the present with artefacts from the past, is specific to our time; see Gumbrecht, *Production of Presence*, 120-2.

⁸² James Hepokoski, ‘Dahlhaus’s Beethoven-Rossini *Stildualismus*: Lingering Legacies of the Text-Event Dichotomy’, in *The Invention of Beethoven and Rossini: Historiography, Analysis, Criticism*, ed. Nicholas Mathew and Benjamin Walton (Cambridge, 2013), 15-48, 31.

as I hope to have shown, during the late nineteenth century. The problem, then, perhaps lies not so much with resolving the conundrum of whether or to what extent nineteenth-century European musical culture was an entourage pursuing the values of works or of performances – opera criticism a chart elucidating on compositions or theatrical events. It might be more about coming to terms with the idea – and I am aware that by seeking for the assimilation of ‘elements of work’ with ‘elements of performance’ I have myself compromised this view – that ‘text-ness’ and ‘event-ness’ are mobile, transferable categories. Rather than being ontologically constitutive of musical works or performances, they reflect and give shape – in contingent, personal as well as larger cultural, contexts – to negotiations between opposing impulses, tensions aroused by time past and time to come.

The most fetishised of musical scores, substantiating the re-enactability of a Great Master’s work, and the photograph (proper or written), calling forth the ephemerality of things, thus may be revealed as unexpectedly close. The question of both, as the authors of the words in this chapter’s epigraphs remind us, is that of the future; both, carelessly handled or suitably preserved and framed, may come to imply as much transience or long-lastingness as we like. On the threshold of their being trace and being aura, of their scents of both nearness and otherness, we are left, as were our nineteenth-century predecessors, with our choices to pursue.⁸³

⁸³ ‘The trace is appearance of a nearness, however far removed the thing that left it behind may be. Aura is appearance of a distance, however close the thing that calls it forth’: Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 447.

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Verdi and *italianità*: Towards a ‘Transnational Turn’

By way of conclusion, I wish to return to the opening passage in my introduction: the 1881 excerpt about Verdi, Italy and Milan from *The Musical Times*. That extract served to introduce the focus and main historiographical concerns of this thesis: namely, the relationship between Verdi and *italianità* in mid- to late-nineteenth-century Milan; a relationship that I wanted to explore as a locus of musical and political attitudes, of local and national identities, of cultural claims about the past as much as about the future. The picture that has emerged from the preceding chapters has demonstrated just how tightly interwoven, and often inseparable, such concerns were.

One of the broader aims of this thesis has been to expand the realm of the ‘political’ in relation to contemporary understandings of Verdi, opera and music in general. Rather than focus exclusively on the reception of the composer’s early operas and their retrospective canonisation from the late 1850s onwards, I have also addressed works by Verdi that engendered different, perhaps less obvious political appropriations. These are revealed by the critical language with which such works came to be discussed, the perception of changes and developments their musical style and performances produced, and their interweaving with broader urban and cultural transformations. For one thing, then, I would suggest that, far from turning away from ‘Verdi politico’ – as the abundance of heated debates might suggest we do – we should strive to explore further the multifaceted interconnections between Verdi, opera and politics. The challenge lies in redefining our understanding of the ‘political’ – in thinking more deeply about the multiple sites, expressions and implications of nineteenth-century political discourse. Furthermore, this thesis has argued that, especially in the Italian case, it is only possible to talk about the nation and national identity by refracting such notions through a myriad of local perspectives. Claims about opera, music and *italianità* have here been approached through a Milanese looking-glass, which has accounted

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for a redefined understanding particularly of Verdi's position and significance within the contemporary local and, by implication, also national culture.

Yet there is a further motif, besides the local and the national, that has mostly remained latent thus far: the 'transnational'. Early in the introduction I mentioned that the 1881 *Musical Times* article could serve to raise further issues: issues concerning differences in perceptions of Verdi, Italian politics and Italian identity in Italy and abroad. Chapter One has, albeit in passing, suggested that geographical discontinuities in the critical reception of the composer indeed account for a more complex image of 'Verdi politico': audiences and readers from different European countries were not only variously receptive to the *topoi* of Verdi's burgeoning political persona (e.g., the 'Viva VERDI' episode), they also each played a distinct part in constructing those Verdian *lieux de mémoire*. In line with a growing body of research in comparative history, cultural transfer and *histoire croisée*, scholars of the Risorgimento have also recently stressed the urge for a transnational 'turn'.¹ Such a turn would imply addressing national identities in terms of cross-national constructs and influences; it would help displace a persistent emphasis, particularly strong in Italian historiography, on the nation-state, thus highlighting – in the words of Oliver Janz and Lucy Riall – 'movement, interaction and interpenetration between and across different groups, societies and political units'.² This thesis could not attempt the tracing of such an interplay of

¹ See in particular the essays published in *The Italian Risorgimento: Transnational Perspectives*, ed. Oliver Janz and Lucy Riall, special issue of *Modern Italy*, 19/1 (2014). Other studies that address foreign views of Italy during the nineteenth century, or stress the importance of a transnational framework, are: Maura O'Connor, *The Romance of Italy and the English Imagination* (Basingstoke and London, 1998); Nelson Moe, *The View from Vesuvius: Italian Culture and the Southern Question* (Berkeley, 2002); Silvana Patriarca, 'Indolence and Regeneration: Tropes and Tensions of Risorgimento Patriotism', *American Historical Review*, 110/2 (2005), 380-408; Lucy Riall, *Garibaldi: Invention of a Hero* (New Haven, 2007); and Maurizio Isabella, *Risorgimento in Exile: Italian Émigrés and the Liberal International in the Post-Napoleonic Era* (Oxford and New York, 2009). For a discussion of transnational history, see C. A. Bayly, Sven Beckert, Matthew Connelly, Isabel Hofmeyr, Wendy Kozol and Patricia Seed, 'AHR Conversation: On Transnational History', *American Historical Review*, 111/5 (2006), 1441-64; and Simon Macdonald, 'Transnational History: A Review of Past and Present Scholarship', available at http://www.ucl.ac.uk/cth/objectives/simon_macdonald_tns_review (accessed 26 February 2014). For an explanation of the differences between comparative history, cultural-transfer studies and *histoire croisée*, see Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmermann, 'Beyond Comparison: *Histoire Croisée* and the Challenge of Reflexivity', *History and Theory*, 45/1 (2006), 30-50.

² Oliver Janz and Lucy Riall, 'Special Issue: The Italian Risorgimento: Transnational Perspectives. Introduction', *Modern Italy*, 19/1 (2014), 1-4.

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Italian and foreign vistas; it was intended, less ambitiously, as a cultural history focusing on Milan. But if only as a prospect for future research, I should like to address a few points here – and do so by taking cues from the topics of my first three chapters.

As is well known, both British and French observers chronicled with interest the political events that shook Italy around 1859-61, and their attraction to Italian politics continued in subsequent years.³ The unforeseen and embarrassing excitement caused by Garibaldi's visit to London in 1864 is only the most famous manifestation of British enthusiasm.⁴ By the mid-1850s, Verdi had also gained wide international prestige and was considered both inside and outside Italy the country's greatest artistic glory. Not surprisingly, he too attracted a good deal of foreign attention: the 'Viva VERDI' episode, for instance, was widely reported in both British and French newspapers during 1859, usually in columns dedicated to the Italian Question.⁵ More than this larger responsiveness, though, what calls for examination are the various channels of interaction that existed between Italian and foreign readers and audiences. Reprints of articles and correspondence by foreign music critics were commonplace in the Italian as well as in the British and French press as early as the mid nineteenth century; many Italian journalists writing on Verdi during the 1860s or 1870s were acquainted particularly with French writings.

³ For contemporary French and British interest in and views on the Risorgimento, see Paul Ginsborg, 'Il mito del Risorgimento nel mondo britannico: "la vera poesia della politica"', in *Il mito del Risorgimento nell'Italia unita*, Atti del convegno, Milano, 9-12 novembre 1993, *Il Risorgimento*, 45 (1995), 384-99; Christopher Duggan, 'Gran Bretagna e Italia nel Risorgimento', and Pietro Finelli and Gian Luca Fruci, "'Que votre revolution soit vièrge". Il "momento risorgimentale" nel discorso politico francese (1796-1870)', both in *Storia d'Italia*, Annali 22, *Il Risorgimento*, ed. Alberto Mario Banti and Paul Ginsborg (Turin, 2007), 747-76 and 777-96. For a case-study of reverberations of Italian politics among British audiences in 1859, see Anthony Howe, "'Friends of Moderate Opinions": Italian Political Thought in 1859 in a British Liberal Mirror', *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 17/5 (2012), 608-11.

⁴ See, for instance, Derek Beales, 'Garibaldi in England: The Politics of Italian Enthusiasm', in *Society and Politics in the Age of the Risorgimento: Essays in Honour of Denis Mack Smith*, ed. John A. Davis and Paul Ginsborg (Cambridge, 1991), 184-216, and Riall, *Garibaldi*, esp. 330-44.

⁵ See *The Examiner*, 8 January 1859; *L'indipendente*, trans. in *The Morning Chronicle*, 8 January 1859; *The Morning Post*, 26 January 1859; *The Leeds Mercury*, 30 July 1859; *The Standard*, 16 September 1859; *The Caledonian Mercury*, 22 September 1859; *The Belfast News-Letter*, 25 March 1861; *L'opinione*, trans. in *La Presse*, 14 January 1859; and *Journal des débats politiques et littéraires*, 21 January 1859.

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What is more, foreign publications were available for consultation to subscribers of reading rooms and societies.⁶ These transnational connections are not hard to trace; the following are only a few examples of many.

Verdi è considerato, al di là delle Alpi, come una delle personificazioni le più generose della moderna Italia. I suoi accenti infiammano il suo paese, l'Italia, attraverso le armonie di questa traduzione poetica e drammatica, pare riconosca i suoi propri sentimenti, le sue proprie speranze, i suoi propri sogni... Come la sua nobile e bella patria, Verdi ha sofferto e pianto in silenzio, egli ha soffocato nel fondo della sua anima i suoi risentimenti, le sue rabbie. Ma così, come sotto la menzogna dei drammi, sempre scelti nella storia con un pensiero patriottico, egli ha saputo trovare di queste melodie commoventi, palpitanti, per cantare lo svegliarsi dell'indipendenza e della libertà!

[Beyond the Alps, Verdi is considered one of the most generous personifications of modern Italy. His accents inflame his country; in the harmonies of this poetic and dramatic translation, Italy seems to recognise her sentiments, her hopes, her dreams... Like his noble and beautiful homeland, Verdi has suffered and cried quietly, he has repressed deep down in his soul his resentments, his rages. But in this way, just as underneath the surface of his operatic subjects, which are always chosen from history with in mind a patriotic thought, he has managed to find moving, quivering tunes for singing the awakening of independence and freedom!]

This passage appeared in the French weekly *Le Courier du dimanche* (a liberal and Orléanist newspaper) and was reprinted in Italian translation in *Il trovatore* in July 1859.⁷ The article centres on Verdi's ability to cast in musical and dramatic shapes the political aspirations and passions of his countrymen – Italy's dream of independence. The piece is doubly interesting. For one thing, its language and rhetoric are extremely explicit for 1859, at least compared to those of most Italian writings. Furthermore, the anonymous writer goes on to pick out, as a way of substantiating his claims, Verdi operas or single pieces within them that are not the works or musical numbers that will become iconic in later literature. 'La impronta di queste ispirazioni' ('the mark of these inspirations'), the journalist argues,

sotto le quali gli amici d'Italia nel dolore riconoscono i battiti del suo cuore, i fremiti de' dolori e delle aspirazioni comuni alla liberazione del giogo dei tedeschi, la si trova, la si riconosce nel finale dell'*Ernani*, nell'aria del *Trovatore*, nel finale de' *Lombardi*, nell'aria e

⁶ Michael Sawall has noted that in 1840 the Gabinetto Vieusseux in Florence subscribed to a considerable number of French (19), British (8) and Austrian/German (2) newspapers; see Sawall, 'Der gesungene Krieg kostet euch kein Blut: Verdi, Bellini und Patriotismus in der Oper in der Epoche des Risorgimento aus Sicht der Augsburger *Allgemeine(n) Zeitung*', *Zeitschrift des Historischen Vereins für Schwaben*, 90 (2000), 145-65, here 155, fn. 46.

⁷ *Le Courier du Dimanche*, trans. in and quoted from *Il trovatore*, 20 July 1859, 2. At this date, *Il trovatore* was still based in Turin; the journal would move to Milan in October of that year.

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nel duetto del *Rigoletto*, nel finale e nei cori del *Macbeth*, nel finale de' *Vespri Siciliani*, ecc. ecc.

[in which the friends of Italy in times of sorrow recognise their beating hearts, the quivers of their agonies and of their shared aspirations for the country's freedom from German yoke, can be found in the finale of *Ernani*, in the aria of *Il trovatore*, in the finale of *I Lombardi*, in the aria and duet of *Rigoletto*, in the finale and the choruses of *Macbeth*, in the finale of *Les Vêpres siciliennes*, etc. etc.]

This 'patriotic' musical canon, when compared to the *Nabucco-Lombardi-Ernani* axis promoted by Marcello (as we saw in Chapter One) and taken up by most Italian biographers of the composer later in the century, suggests that Verdi's *risorgimentale* image might have developed along different, parallel routes; it also points to the likelihood that the myth of *Nabucco*, and more generally of Verdi's early choruses, became a preponderant part of the story only in a later phase.⁸

Within this later process, particularly within the mythologisation of *Nabucco* in connection to its early performances at La Scala in 1842, a contribution might have also come from abroad, as the next example invites us to believe. An anonymous English journalist, writing for *The Musical World* in 1869, provided a partial English translation of Michele Lessona's biographical sketch of Verdi, published in Italy as a chapter of his book *Volere è potere*. Lessona's account has long been regarded by scholars as one of the very first narratives that construct 'Va pensiero' into the core of the *Nabucco* myth.⁹ In some introductory remarks to this translation, the English writer blames Lessona for omitting 'one great cause of the immense popularity of *Nabucco* on its first appearance at Milan'. 'I recollect hearing it at the Scala', the journalist goes on to explain,

in the month of August, four months after it was first brought out, and I have the liveliest remembrance of the degree in which its popularity was enhanced by the subject of the opera itself – by its expressing the protest of a downtrodden and captive nationality against the yoke of a foreign conqueror. The figures on the stage were a Babylonish monarch and

⁸ The author of the article from *Le Courrier du Dimanche*, to be sure, does claim that 'gli slanci d'entusiasmo, le sublimi aspirazioni, i patetici lamenti di un popolo e di un paese oppresso, di un'anima fiera ed eroica, codesti nobili canti [...] fanno battere egualmente tutti i cuori de' compatrioti dell'autore del *Nabucco*' (p. 2). But *Nabucco* here is less singled out as a 'patriotic' opera than used, owing to its popularity, as part of an epithet to refer to Verdi.

⁹ The chorus seemed to be taking on its canonic status also in other writings dating from around the same period; see the article by A. G. [Antonio Ghislanzoni], in *GMM*, 28 July 1867, 238, partially repr. in Appendix 2 of Chapter One.

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Hebrew exiles, but you could tell from the glances exchanged in the boxes and the pit that the audience heard in those choruses the discontent of Italian citizens with an Austrian viceroy.¹⁰

The English commentator does not single out ‘Va pensiero’ as a number with any special role or metaphorical significance; but his is a very early account of – indeed, to my knowledge the earliest known reference to – the nationalist feeling with which Verdi’s opera would supposedly have been associated at its performances in 1842. Considering that the 1840s in England had seen a wide vogue for ‘Va pensiero’, documented by the many re-printings of this chorus during the period, it seems reasonable to wonder whether English interest in this chorus could have played a part in its political canonisation in later years.¹¹

It is once again in foreign articles that some early connections between the political aspirations of the Italian people, Verdi’s own ‘patriotic’ activity and the dramatic content of two scenes from *Don Carlo* are made. Chapter Two attempted to move beyond a political reading of the opera as containing allusions to or resonances with the contemporary Italian political situation, and has done so mostly because of the absence of any such interpretation in the Italian press. Instead, the chapter tried to broaden the political significance of the opera within the Milanese milieu. Yet the next two passages, both of which are of French provenance and were translated or reprinted in the *Gazzetta musicale di Milano* in 1867, draw more direct links:

dans ce chœur des Flamands [...] Verdi a mis la même ardeur contenue, la même énergie décidée à tout, au sacrifice, à la mort, au martyre. C’est l’âpre appel de la liberté étouffée qui demande à vivre [...] Tous les sanglots de son Italie ont un jour passé dans la bouche du *Trovatore* [...] Cette fois, le sanglot s’est fait menace [...] son nom [du Verdi], pour sa patrie, a été un signal d’affranchissement, un cri de ralliement; il s’est assis, cet artiste, dans les parlements...¹²

[in the chorus of the Flemish deputies [...] Verdi has put the same concentrated ardour, the same determined energy to everything: to sacrifice, to death, to martyrdom. It is the cruel appeal of suppressed freedom that demands life [...] All the sobs of his Italy passed through the mouth of *Il trovatore* [...] This time the sob has turned into a threat [...] [Verdi’s] name was a signal of emancipation for his homeland, a rallying cry; that artist sat in the Parliament...]

¹⁰ Anon., ‘Giuseppe Verdi (by an Enthusiastic Verdist)’, *The Musical World*, 24 April 1869, 288; the article-translation continues in the issues of 15 and 22 May, 342 and 365. Lessona’s biographical sketch of Verdi is translated up to the end of the section focusing on *Nabucco*.

¹¹ On the English reception of ‘Va pensiero’, see Chloe Valenti, ‘Verdi Reception in London, 1842-1877’ (Ph.D. diss., University of Cambridge, 2010), 134-59.

¹² *Le Figaro*, 17 February 1867, trans. in and quoted from *GMM*, 24 February 1867, 59.

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Poi viene il duetto fra Posa e Filippo, difficilissimo per la sua situazione ed il suo colore politico [...] Un soffio di libertà sembra animarlo; vi si respira la viva preoccupazione del patriota italiano, che non ha dimenticato i giorni crudeli e nefasti in cui la sua patria languiva nel più crudele servaggio.¹³

[Then comes the duet between Posa and Philip, which is very difficult because of the dramatic situation and political colour [...] A breath of freedom seems to animate it; one can feel the deep preoccupation of the Italian patriot, who has not forgotten the cruel and ill-omened days when his homeland languished in the most ferocious slavery.]

The slippage between understandings of political events, of human biography and of operatic meaning is all too apparent; in fact it is precisely within such blurring of different fields of experience that the Verdi myth has thrived. The passages also point to French interest in the Italian Question, interest that grew to become increasingly reflected in the local press since the mid-1850s.¹⁴ What is more, in Hervé Gartioux's account, the Parisian reception of *Don Carlos* suggests that the Franco-Prussian tensions of the late 1860s underpinned and became interwoven with attitudes to Verdi's opera and the composer in general: if some journalists were attracted to Verdi's *italianità* (as identified both in his music and his life), others tried to 'naturalise' him – above all by rejecting the German, so-called

¹³ *La Patrie*, trans. in and quoted from *GMM*, 24 March 1867, 92.

¹⁴ Gartioux notes that from 1856 the Italian cause increasingly found support particularly in French republican newspapers; see *Giuseppe Verdi, Les vêpres siciliennes: Dossier de presse parisienne (1855)*, ed. Hervé Gartioux (Heilbronn, 1995), 12. On Verdi's 'patriotic' credentials, see also the following passages from other reviews of *Don Carlos*: 'Nul artiste italien n'est plus que lui, en effet, la résultante directe de l'état social, politique, religieux, moral de l'Italie; j'entends de l'Italie encore livrée à l'étranger, et non de l'Italie régénérée et libre que nous saluons fraternellement aujourd'hui. Les déchirements intérieurs de la mère-patrie, ses frémissements, ses colères contenues, ses révoltes toujours grondantes, ses espérances prochaines soudainement réveillées et brusquement éteintes, ses désespoirs, ses aspirations, sa constance, Verdi a tout vu, tout entendu, tout senti. Derrière ce compositeur, il y a un patriote, et derrière ce patriote, un homme': A. de Gasperini, in *La Liberté*, 13 March 1867, quoted from *Giuseppe Verdi, Don Carlos: Dossier de presse parisienne (1867)*, ed. Hervé Gartioux (Heilbronn, 1997), 34. 'Il fallait au peuple italien un art révolutionnaire, qui donnât le change à ce besoin d'émotions comprimées, tendues à l'excès et s'énervant dans l'impuissance. Les grands artistes, comme les grands hommes d'Etat, naissent toujours à une heure providentielle, et ne sont, pour ainsi dire, que des instruments sonores aux mains d'un peuple, sur lesquels celui-ci exécute les *variations* de ses idées et de ses passions. Verdi – avec sa grandeur touchant à l'emphase, avec ses effets outrés jusqu'à la violence, avec sa palette de sentiments héroïques chargée de tons criards – répondait merveilleusement à l'humeur d'un peuple qui se consolait, avec des opéras, de n'avoir pas encore de théâtre pour ses passions politiques, en apportant la chaleur de la politique dans la passion du théâtre': B[enoît] Jouvin, in *La Guide musical*, 14 March 1867, 3, passage repr. with modifications in B[enoît] Jouvin, in *La Presse*, 25 November 1872, 1.

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‘Wagnerian’ elements of his latest opera.¹⁵ It is hard, then, to overestimate the interplay of strictly musical (if any) and broader political concerns, or of distinct agendas played out even in the same geographical spaces; even more to assess the results of the travelling of such views along transnational routes.

One further example of a discrepancy between the Italian and foreign reception of a work by Verdi comes from a French review of the *Messa da Requiem*, signed by F. de Lagenevais (pseudonym of Ange-Henri Blaze de Bury). As noted in Chapter Three, following its first performances in Milan in 1874, the *Requiem* came to be appropriated to – and criticised because of – political agendas of various kinds. Yet Italian critics did not discuss its oft-emphasised connection, in later scholarly literature, with Manzoni – the most prominent literary icon of the Risorgimento. Manzoni does, however, feature in Blaze de Bury’s article. After rehearsing what were by then established political *topoi* about the composer, the French critic goes on to add:

Verdi fut ainsi le collaborateur de Cavour et de Victor-Emmanuel. A cette même cause de l’indépendance nationale, l’auteur des *Promessi Sposi* avait, lui aussi, dévoué son génie et les tendances de la vie la plus pure et la plus laborieuse, et c’est à la mémoire de Manzoni, à la gloire du compatriote et de l’ami, que Verdi consacre aujourd’hui cette messe de *Requiem*, œuvre sinon religieuse, du moins inspirée par une pensée toute religieuse.¹⁶

[Verdi was thus the collaborator of Cavour and Victor Emanuel. To that same cause of national independence, the author of *I promessi sposi* had himself devoted his genius and oriented his purest and most laborious life, and it is to the memory of Manzoni, to the glory of his compatriot and friend, that today Verdi dedicates his *Requiem* Mass, which, if not a religious work, is at least inspired by an all religious thought.]

At least on one occasion, then, it seems as though Verdi’s wish to pursue an afterlife in History hand in hand with Manzoni was picked up, the two artists’ names made greater still by their devotion to the secular religion of Italy’s cause of independence.

¹⁵ This process of ‘naturalisation’ had started with the Parisian premieres of *Il trovatore* (Théâtre Italien, 1854) and *Les vêpres siciliennes* (Opéra, 1855), and became crucial in the 1860s following the premieres of *Un ballo in maschera* (Italien, 1861) and Wagner’s *Tannhäuser* (Opéra, 1861); see *La réception de Verdi en France: anthologie de la presse 1845-1894*, ed. Hervé Gartioux, (Weinsberg, 2001), 9-24, and *Giuseppe Verdi, Don Carlos: Dossier*, 2-15.

¹⁶ F. de Lagenevais [Ange-Henri Blaze de Bury], ‘Revue musicale’, *Revue des deux mondes*, 15 June 1874, 941-55, 942; article repr. almost unchanged in Blaze de Bury, ‘Verdi’, in Blaze de Bury, *Musiciens du passé, du présent et de l’avenir* (Paris, 1880), 247-79, 256.

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My survey of foreign views, and their occasional migrations into Italian papers, has to end here. Material is abundant, but my aim has been merely to raise questions that emerged in the course of this research – and which can only be addressed properly in the future. Of course, these examples do not simply suggest that we need more studies of Verdi reception in foreign countries: Gundula Kreuzer's fascinating account of how the figure of Verdi and his music were shaped and appropriated in German lands during the late-nineteenth and twentieth centuries has contributed much to answering calls in this direction. Rather, I want to propose that a supranational framework, particularly a transnational approach, can help as much as a greater focus on local viewpoints to complicate our understanding of how nineteenth-century notions of Verdi, *italianità* and Italian music came to be formed. Taking such a stance would mean treating cities, or at least large European cities, as links in cross-national networks, ones constituted by the increasing circulation of news, ideas, commodities and people across national borders. Far from aiming only for a comparative study or a study of cultural transfer, both of which retain the idea of national cultural spaces being 'given', such research would benefit from pursuing images of Verdi, opera and Italian identity that were shaped, so to speak, 'on the road' – through a constant back-and-forth of views and information.¹⁷

An approach of this kind would only be one possible way out of standard views of opera's, and above all of Verdi's, symbiotic relationship with *italianità*. Another *porte de sortie* would consider the reception of foreign works on Italian stages. Research about the identity-shaping role of opera in Italy during the pre- and post-Unification decades has mostly focused on Italian opera. However, the internationalisation of the operatic repertoire from mid-century – a process that was invested with different meanings in each major Italian city – also calls for engagement with French and German opera. An enquiry into critical responses to and appropriation of such works to municipal and national agendas would clarify how different facets of Italian culture were shaped through a continuous dialogue

¹⁷ The Paris-based activity, particularly during the 1870s, of Arthur Pougin and Jacopo Caponi, who were the authors of the very influential and overtly political *Vita aneddotica di Verdi*, would be a compelling subject of study. Both journalists maintained strong links with Italian newspapers and periodicals.

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with concepts of Europe and cosmopolitanism, not to mention notions of progress and musical modernity.¹⁸ Ultimately, even Verdi's enduring national image might emerge reshaped, redefined as the product of a much wider, European collective enterprise.

If research along these supranational lines is worth pursuing, it is not only because of its consistency with the latest scholarly trends in historical studies. Its interest would also stem from its potential to bring opposite poles closer to each other: ideas of Italian-ness and foreign-ness, images of crisis and progress, reveries about the past and the future. What is more, tracing the shifting image of Verdi and opera over time and space would force us to seek meaning and answers concerning *italianità* in places that we would not have expected: it would call attention to alternative stories, to the lives and thoughts of lesser-known individuals, and to their increasing interconnection across Europe, made possible by new media and developing technologies. Exploring more deeply the vicissitudes of Verdi's myth could serve to remind us that, for all the passions then as now aroused by the political tints of the composer, the myth has as much to say about other aspects of Verdi, as well as Italian and European culture of the time. In some way, striving for such goals would imply laying bare our own, always inconstant politics: letting them infuse, as honestly and productively as we can, our academic and other browsing of the past.

¹⁸ This is one of the conclusions suggested by Axel Körner's research on Bologna's post-Unification cultural politics; see Körner, *Politics of Culture in Liberal Italy: From Unification to Fascism* (New York and London, 2009).

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